The Complete Works of
KĀLIDĀSA

Volume Two
PLAYS

Translated By Chandra Rajan



SAHITYA AKADEMI

Kālidāsa's status as the major poet and dramatist in classical Sanskrit literature is unquestioned. Yet, whereas individual works of the poet have been translated, an edition containing an English translation of his collected works does not seem to have been undertaken, specially a rendering that combines fidelity to the text with readability in contemporary English. The three-volume edition planned by the Sahitya Akademi might well be the first translation into English of the Kalidasa-corpus in its entirety, thereby fulfilling a long-felt need and making these classics accessible to a much wider audience than at present

All seven of the great poet's works that are considered authentically his are being rendered into English verse (verse and prose in the plays) by Chandra Rajan. Her critical introduction serves to place the text in their context and suggests ways of looking at them singly and as part of the ouevre.

The first volume is devoted to the poems of Kalidasa. This second volume contains his plays.

Kalidasa's knowledge of the human heart and his understanding of the complex play of human motivation, are profound. A keen observer of nature in all its varied aspects – he sees with a painter's eye and speaks with a poet's tongue – he is at the same time a learned writer who wears his enormous learning lightly and with grace. A mystic awareness of the transcendental combines in his works with a sensuous feeling for beauty in woman and nature, reflecting as it does the blend of the erotic and spiritual that characterises Siva mythology. In all of his works he celebrates the values of the great civilisation that he was heir to, but not without questioning as is made amply clear in the introduction.

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THE COMPLETE WORKS OF KĀLIDĀSA

The Complete Works of Kālidāsa

(In three volumes)

VOLUME TWO

Translated from the Original Sanskrit and Prakrit
with an Introduction by

CHANDRA RAJAN

SAHITYA AKADEMI

The Complete Works of Kālidāsa Vol. II : English Translation by Chandra Rajan, from the Original Sanskrit and Prakrit. Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. 2002

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C.I.T. Campus, T.T.T.I. Post, Tharamani
Chennai 600 013

First Published 2002

ISBN 81-260-1484-9

Rupees Three Hundred and Fifty

Typeset and Printed at Swastik Printers, Delhi

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VOLUME 2

The Plays

Om Namah Śivāya
(Homage to Śivam, The Good, The Beneficent)

yakṣavsvarūpāya jaṭādharāya
pinākahastāya sanātanāya /
divyāya devāya digambarāya tasmai
yakāraya namah Śivāya //
[Śankara : Śivapañcākṣara stotra (5)]

To that, assuming Form to be adored,
Wearing the *yogi's* topknot
thick, twisted, matted hair –
Holding the Trident that is Time;
To the Everlasting;
To that wondrous Effulgence
Mantled in Space;
Informing that mystic, syllable – YA;
Homage to Sivam,
The Good, The Beneficent

Acknowledgements and Prefatory Remarks

I first wish to thank my husband, Professor Balachandra Rajan and my daughter, Professor Tilottama Rajan for all the wide-ranging discussions we have had over the years on art in general and literary criticism in particular. Since they are both eminent scholars in another cultural-literary tradition, viz. the Euro-American, a comparative dimension has always been part of the discussions. Added to my own early training in English literature and literary criticism, this interchange of views and ideas relating to the *reading* of texts and placing them in their own metaphysical context (world-views of the Indian and European traditions being widely divergent) has helped me in formulating for myself a set of critical approaches and an aesthetic perspective that is neither strictly traditionalist nor eurocentric. This has worked out as appropriate and rewarding in my work on ancient Sanskrit texts.

The arduous work of preparing this book for publication has been done for the most part at Manana Devahuti-Damodar Library of Indian Civilization in Greater Kailash II under the supervision of its trustee, Veena Sachdev. I express my appreciation of the care with which the work has been carried out considering the special problems that are encountered in preparing a typescript of Sanskrit plays translated into English.

I am specially grateful to Veena Sachdev, the *sūtradhārī* who holds many threads in her capable hands who has not only made the facilities of Manana Library available for my work but helped in several other ways : providing advice and offering suggestions for the preparation of the format of the book; sharing the onerous task of proofreading with me. I express my deep appreciation of her personal interest in my work and in this book, and for giving not just generously but unstintingly of her time, thought and energies.

I wish to thank Sri Bihari Lal of Manana Library for typing the translations of the plays in this volume and Sri A. Hamza for pagesetting the entire typescript.

I thank Sri Nandanan Pillai for typing the introductory material, the annotations and the rest of the critical apparatus in the book.

To the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, I owe thanks for their continuing interest in my Kalidasa-project despite delays caused by my poor health. I wish to thank the Akademi's Secretary, Professor K. Satchidanandan for being very understanding. Thanks are due to Ms. Gitanjali Chatterjee and Sri J. Ponnudurai of the Sahitya Akademi for looking after the book in its final stage.

The final acknowledgement that I wish to make, though it might appear somewhat unusual is very meaningful in a special sense. I give thanks to a many-splendoured civilization out of a deep sense of gratitude for being born into it and being a part of it. This Bharatiya heritage that belongs to all of us, is not simply 'history' lost in the past whose records are in libraries and in museums to glance at occasionally, or from time to time. It is a living presence vitalizing our imaginative life and energies. The Kalidasa-project is a small effort on my part to make accessible some of the finest works in Sanskrit Literature to a larger readership; to provide readers within the culture and outside it who might be interested in our classics but not knowing any Sanskrit have no direct access to the originals, with readable translations in English. This book (and the previous volume) is a small tribute to the great poet and the heritage with its many values and ideals that he so eloquently celebrates in his works. I should add that this tribute (as I call it) in the form of *sabdāñjali* is offered in a genuine spirit of service (*sevā*) to one of the many 'splendours' already referred to—*Vāk-Saraswatī*, emanation of the One, Holy Creative Power in the Universe spoken of in many ways and known by a thousand names. Manana Devahuti-Damodar Library of Indian Civilization and Veena Sachdev have joyously shared in this service to make it fruitful. It is only fitting to end with the words that are the final utterance of the Ṛgveda.

Common our mantras :
Common our society :
Common our minds :
Common our deepest thoughts :
With common words of prayer
I offer for all the oblation universal :
Common be our purpose :
With hearts and minds in one accord :
Let us act together :
Let us live together in happiness.

New Delhi
This day of Saraswati Puja
Aswina Masa 21 Vikram 2058
(October 25, 2001)

Chandra Rajan

Abbreviations

ASU	Allahabad University Studies
AV	Atharvaveda
BM	Bharat Mallika – seventeenth century commentator on *Meghadūtam* (The Cloud Messenger).
BNM	*Bharata-Nāṭya-Mañjarī*
BORI	Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune
comm.	Commentary
IP	Indian Philosophy
JUB	*Journal of the University of Bombay*
KS	Kashi Series, Chowkhamba Press, of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*
Kumāra	*Kumārasambhavam*
Mal.; Malavika	*Mālavikāgnimitram*
Manu	Institutes of Manu
Mbh.	*Mahābhārata*
Megh.	*Meghadūtam*
MNG	*Nāṭyaśāstra*, ed. with tr. by M.N. Ghose
NS	*Nāṭyaśastra*
R	*Raghuvaṁśam*
Ram.	*Rāmāyaṇa*
Rtu.	*Ṛtusamhāram*
RV	Ṛgveda
Sak	*Abhijñānaśākuntalam; Śakuntalā* for short
SB	*Śata-patha Brāhamaṇa*
Skt	Sanskrit
St.	Stanza
Urvasi	*Vikramorvaśīyam*
v.	Verse

Key to the Pronunciation of Sanskrit Words

Vowels : The line on top of a vowel indicates that it is long.

a (short) as the u in b*u*t
a (long) as the a in f*ar*
i (short) as the i in s*i*t
ī (long) as the ee in sw*ee*t
u (short) as the u in p*u*t
ū (long) as the oo in c*oo*l
r with a dot is a vowel like the i in f*i*rst or u in f*ur*ther
e is always a long vowel like a in m*ate*
ai as the i in p*i*le
o is always long as the o in p*o*le
ow as the ow in *owl*

The visarga, two vertically lined points ':' is transliterated into roman as an 'h' and sounded like the 'h' in 'loch'; e.g. pramattaḥ, bhartuḥ, Duḥṣanta.

Also note, the final 'i' in feminine nouns is long in the nominative case but short in the vocative case; e.g. Vetravatī and Vetravati (when she is addressed by name).

Consonants : k is the same as in English as in *k*itten
kh is aspirated
g as in goat
gh is aspirated
c is ch as in *ch*urch or *c*ello
ch is aspirated
j as in *j*ewel
jh is aspirated
ṭ and ḍ are hard when dotted below as in *t*alk and do*t*
ṭh is the aspirated sound
ḍh is aspirated
ṇ when dotted is a dental; the tongue has to curl back to touch the palate.
ṅ as in si*ng*
ñ as in senor

t undotted is a soft sound
th is aspirated as in *th*ermal
d undotted is a soft sound – there is no corresponding English sound the Russian 'da' is the closest.
dh is aspirated
p and b are the same as in English
ph and bh are aspirated
The Skt v is an English w
There are 3 sibilants in Skt : s as in *s*ong. ṣ as in *sh*ower and a palatal Ś in between, e.g. Śiva

Key to Prose Passages in the Plays

Lines of prose are referred to using points followed by plus and minus signs : e.g. 1.20. + 16-18 refers to the prose lines 16-18 after verse 20 in Act I; 3.36. – 2.3. refers to the prose lines 2.3 before verse 30 in Act 3.

A Note on Texts and Translations

Kālidāsa's works have unfortunately come down to us not in their original form, but in several recensions (divergent versions of a text) current in different regions of the country. The ancestry of the recensions is not clear. But it is evident that after his lifetime, Kālidāsa's poems and plays became subject to alterations, the reasons for which are again not clear. It is not uncommon for this to happen in the history of Sanskrit literature. Many factors would have contributed to the process of the one true text becoming diverse recensions. The manuscripts of the works, none of them contemporaneous with the author, belong to one or other of the recensions. They display a bewildering variety of readings; the length of the texts themselves as well as the number and order of the verses in them vary; interpolations present a problem. Some of the variants are substantive enough to warrant a somewhat different reading of the text, as in the case of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* (*Śakuntalā* for short).

The translations in this volume differ in their textual basis from the great majority of other translations. The text of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* follows the Eastern Indian (Bengal) recension to which insufficient attention has been given. Even though the Bengal version is not the one translators most frequently use, the bibliographical arguments for *Śakuntalā* in particular are not unequal to those for other texts and as I shall endeavour to show, there are strong aesthetic arguments for it.

The text of *Śakuntalā* has been handed down in four main recensions: Eastern or Bengal, Southern, Kashmir and Devanagari (Northern). Which of these comes closest to the play as Kālidāsa wrote it and as it was staged during his lifetime is difficult to determine, to say the least. Dileep Kumar Kanjilal attempts this difficult task in his critical edition of the play, *A Reconstruction of the Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, 1980. He finds motifs, images and word-clusters specific to the Bengal Recension echoed in later plays, such as Harṣa's. He also examines the Prakrit verses and finds them correct grammatically and metrically in the Bengal text and indicating where they are not in other texts, argues for its superior authenticity. Pischel who edited the play according to the Bengal Recension in 1877 (reprinted in the Harvard Oriental Series, 1922, after his death), is of a similar opinion.

The Devanagari Recension of *Śakuntalā* with Rāghava Bhatta's commentary was published by the Nirnaya Sagar Press, Mumbai, in 1883. It is the shortest text of the play and the one frequently translated. The Bengal Recension, which I have translated, is a longer version, containing 35 more verses and a number of additional prose passages. My translation is based on the critical edition produced by Kanjilal, already referred to. In his introduction, Kanjilal writes that he has reconstructed the play on the basis of the oldest extant manuscript, an early twelfth century Newari manuscript in the possession of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, supported by other Bengal and Sarada manuscripts, two of the latter not having been utilized before. The differences between the Pischel and Kanjilal editions are few and minor. I have adopted one Devanagari variant in my translation as being more appropriate in the context. In 7.7.2, the Bengal Recension reads *aga*, meaning trees, while the Devanagari has *ara*, the spokes of a wheel. This might be an example of the kind of error a copyist of manuscripts could have made.

One can argue that the Bengal text is more satisfying, aesthetically. The longer and more numerous prose passages and the additional verses, result in a smoother narrative and fuller characterization. The differences between the two recensions are found mainly in Acts I and 3; they are particularly significant in the love episodes which the Devanagari text treats in a rather perfunctory manner.

The Devanagari text (D) seems to make somewhat abrupt transitions in some places, giving the impression of something missing at that point. For example, it does not contain the lines at the end of Act 1, where Anasūyā asks Śakuntalā to hurry up and come with her and Priyamvadā, as well as Śakuntalā's response about the numbness in her thighs—a deft touch which conveys the sudden physical impact an overpowering emotion might make. Again, in Act 2, the Devanagari text does not have st.8 which seems to be an appropriate response to Māḍhavya's wry comment preceding it. The conversation regarding the untimely blossoming of the Māḍhavī bush is not included either (1.20.+14-30). This passage is important because it foreshadows Śakuntalā's marriage and characterizes it at the same time.

The Bengal text devotes more space to the development of the love of Śakuntalā and Duḥṣānta, in Act 3. It presents the courtship as well as the conflict in Śakuntalā's mind in some detail. Stanza 40 at the end of Act 3 reveals something of the complexity of the king's character. The first three lines bring out one aspect, the pleasure-loving and philandering side to his nature, and it articulates his *carpe diem* philosophy—seize the moment before it flies away beyond your reach. But it concludes on a different

note, when Duḥṣanta says, 'My heart, in the beloved's presence, stands somewhat abashed'. A man of the world, assured and poised and a great king who has fallen in and out of love many times, has had his way presumably and got what he wanted, Duḥṣanta now stands dumbfounded before the innocence and purity that Śakuntalā represents. By sharply abbreviating a long section of verse and prose starting at st. 26 (20 in D) which concludes with the important stanza discussed above, the Devanagari text makes a crucial omission. It further omits the delightful prose passage of four-cornered banter which follows st. 23 (st. 18 in D).

The king in the Bengal text is more fully drawn. He is a man of words as well as deeds, more so than in the Devanagari text. He loves as passionately as he fights furiously. And he is a man who is in love with love as much as he is in love with a girl; a man who talks about love and being in love in a highly self-conscious manner. And how beautifully he speaks about it all! By presenting Duḥṣanta in the first half of the play as a passionate lover, courtly and gallant—too gallant for the liking of the simple hermit girl who mistrusts such gallantry, and as it turns out with good reason—Kālidasā draws a sharp contrast between this man, debonair, noble and even considerate at times, and the cynical, harsh and cold king of Act 5.

Śakuntalā is also drawn more finely in the Bengal text. The final section of Act 3, already referred to, reveals another side to her character; she is not wholly innocent of the ways of love. Seeing through the king's flimsy stratagems to get close to her, she indicates that she too can play at this game, though not with his expertise. The Śakuntalā of the Bengal text also shows some of the fiery spirit of her ancestress in the epic. Both the hero and the heroine are more idealized in the Devanagari text; they are more interesting in the other.

The minor characters come across better in the Bengal text. Priyamvadā has more lines given to her, providing more scope for her bubbling sense of fun and her readiness to tease both Śakuntalā and the king. Māḍhavya's sharp wit, always reaching out to deflate Duḥṣanta's ego and undercut his high flown statements, has more room to play around.

The captions at the end of each Act seem to be a feature of the Bengal Recension. They are not found in the Devanagari texts of the plays, though the epic *Raghuvaṁśam* and the long poem *Kumārasambhavam* have captions at the end of each canto. In *Śakuntalā*, the captions for the first two Acts, 'The Chase' and 'The Concealment of the Telling' are notable. They contain an element of symbolism. The chase is a central motif in Act 1; the king is not merely chasing a deer; he is after a girl. The deer is closely associated with Śakuntalā through imagery and it leads the king into her world, which

I have characterized in the introduction as the 'green world' as opposed to the gilded world of the court. The chase motif is picked up in Act 2 where we come across several phrases pertaining to the sport of hunting: the hunter's skill; his elation when he gets the quarry; knowledge of 'the changing responses of fear and anger of woodland creatures'. (Śakuntalā reminds the king in Act 5, that during his stay in the Hermitage, he once described her and her pet fawn as kin, both 'creatures of the woods'). All of these phrases conveying as they do the sense of dominance over the prey and gaining possession of it, characterize the initial attitude to and relationship of Duḥṣanta with Śakuntalā.

The interesting point to note about the caption to Act 2, 'The Concealment of the Telling' is that it is parallelled by another concealment in Act 4, the concealment of Durvāsa's curse by Śakuntalā's friends. The first concealment in Act 2, moves the plot forward; the second introduces the complication. The theme of concealment has ramifications in the play.

The translation of *Mālavikāgnimitram* is based on the text of the play commented upon by Katayavema in his *Kumāragirirājīya* edited by M.R. Kale. The Sahitya Akademi edition of the play by K.A. Subramania Iyer has been consulted as well.

The translation of *Vikramorvaśīyam* is based on the edition prepared by M.R. Kale which includes all the Prakrit verses in Act 4 that are considered by some Sanskritists as not Kālidāsa's. However, he has placed these separately in an appendix, a decision that points to his bias. This edition has Ranganatha's commentary; and in places Kale cites Velankar (the Sahitya Akademi edition of the play). I have translated all of Ranganatha's readings (considered interpolations by some) and placed them separately as footnotes. Some of these verses are quite charming. At times they add something to the meaning.

We now come to the matter of translation and the translation of Kālidāsa's texts specifically. Translation is like serving two masters at the same time. Languages do differ widely in their grammatical structures and though one hopes to meet the demands of the source and receiving languages in a balanced manner, it is a fact that compromises have to be made one way or the other. We endeavour to provide the best approximation to the original not only within the limitations set by our own abilities but more so within those set by the receiving language.

Sanskrit is a highly inflected language. It has some distinctive features which indeed constitute some of its strengths; for example, the extensive use of compound words and prefixes, and an array of synonyms with slight

nuances of meaning that colour the expression of what is being said. The inflexional structure and the use of compound words give the language a tightly knit compactness which is of importance in poetry; this compactness suffers some dilution in translation. Because Sanskrit is a highly inflected language, word order is not of special importance as it is in English; punctuation is minimal consisting of a vertical stroke (|) to mark the end of the second quarter of a stanza and two vertical strokes (||) that correspond to the period in English. Inversions are frequent, with the predicate often separated from subject and object by long clauses consisting of single compound words, with their sub-units linked alliteratively not only for euphonic but other poetic effects as well. This lends the language a musical quality difficult to convey in another language. This is especially true in the case of poetry which was and still is chanted or sung, and not read silently.

Compound words are also able to project images with immediacy: for example the word, *paruṣapavanavegotkṣiptasaṁśuṣkaparṇāḥ* (*Ṛtu* : 1.22) conveys strongly the picture of wild winds and their force and energy: by splitting the compound word into its sub-units we have the following:

paruṣa-pavana-vega-utkṣipta-saṁ-śuṣka-parṇāḥ
violent-winds-by great velocity-hurling-up-shrivelled-leaves

Compound words can also articulate ambivalences.

Puns, proverbs and certain kinds of wordplay especially those dependent on sonic resemblances or identity are almost untranslateable; for example, the phrase *dhanuṣ-khaṇḍam ākhaṇḍalasya,* the literal meaning of which is a fragment of the bow wielded by the fragmentor/breaker we need notes to make the point clear. However this is a difficulty present in all translation; for example, in the following line from Keats: 'Thou *still* unravished bride of quietness', something is bound to get left out in translating it into an Indian language; specifically, one would be hard put to find a single word to convey both senses of the word 'still'.

Kālidāsa's poetry like much of Indian art is stylized. The stylization is not a rhetorical procedure but part of the self-awareness with which the verse shapes itself. The translation therefore, to be faithful, has to somehow contrive to be stylized and readable; to steer clear of a literalness of rendering as well as an identification of readability with contemporaneity. It has been my endeavour throughout this volume of translations to be faithful not simply to what the poetry says (its paraphraseable meaning) but also to how it says what it says. That would be to respect its way of perceiving itself to create artifacts of the imagination. To accomplish this with some degree of success, inversions are unavoidable at places, and also

the occasional passive construction which is frequent in Sanskrit. I have used these sparingly.

The translation of the prose in the drama poses its own brand of problems. Kālidāsa uses several dialects (*prakrits*) current in his day. It is not possible to differentiate between them by style or through diction. Therefore, there is an unavoidable ironing out of the rich variety of speech of that age into one flat prose.

But I have attempted some slight differentiation in another area. There are several levels of speech in the plays; depending on the occasion, private or public, and on the relationships of the speakers to one another; and here some differentiation is possible, e.g. the prelude at the beginning of *Śak.* 6.

Nature has a life of its own in Indian thought; it enshrines centres of power, radiating holiness, plenitude, beauty. For this reason, I have refrained from using the neuter form of the English pronoun. A hill is therefore a 'he' and a stream is a radiant 'she'.

I have translated only a few of the names of the flora in the Kalidasan landscape. While there are several kinds of lotuses mentioned, each with its own distinctive name in the original and each beautifully evocative, I have reluctantly used the generic term 'lotus'. I have however, retained the Sanskrit names for many other flowers, trees, shrubs and vines mentioned or described, for two reasons. Firstly, English equivalents are not readily available (except botanical terms) and identifications are not always definitive. Secondly, the Sanskrit names form part of the poetic effect in certain passages; they frequently sound like the roll call of epic heroes and their weapons.

> Beauty, Genius of Blossom-Time, forsaking
> the Kadamba, Kutaja and Kakubha,
> the Sarja and the Arjuna,
> now dwells with the Saptaparṇa.
>
> (*Ṛtu* : 3.3)

Here, the poet seems to be having some fun at the expense of the epic poets.

On the other hand, I have translated nearly all of the epithets for Indra, Kāma (Eros), Śiva, in the plays because the meaning of a particular epithet chosen by the poet has a specific significance in the context: for example, in *Śak*: 6:30, the epithet for Indra, *Śata-kratu*, ' The Lord of a Hundred Powers', serves to enhance Duḥṣanta's own glory; in *Śak* : 7: 1, Indra is called Marutvat—He who is accompanied by Storm Winds (*Maruts*) again

glorifying Duḥṣanta; Ākhaṇḍala, The Breaker of Dark Clouds (dark forces) to let light shine through, suggests in the context that the dark delusion clouding the king's memory is destroyed through Indra's power or compassion.

The translations are accompanied by a long introduction, notes, an annotated glossary and appendices. The introduction suggests ways of looking at the three works in this volume singly and as a group. These are however not exhaustive for want of space. Still, an attempt has been made within a brief compass to relate these works in a meaningful way and trace a pattern of development in the poet's *oeuvre.* The myths that lend an added depth and resonance to a work are briefly recounted in Appendix II.

The notes and glossary should be of some help in bridging gaps in communication by explaining the numerous mythological and metaphysical allusions. They also point to the possibility of multiple readings of a line or passage; in most cases a translation can convey only one of the possible readings.

Because Kālidāsa's works emerge out of a philosophical context (as all great works of art do) and return us to it, some information about religious and metaphysical concepts, both Vedic and Saiva, is unavoidable. It has been kept to a minimum.

The presence of all this background information in no way implies that Kālidāsa cannot be read with pleasure and delight without this explanatory apparatus. The response to great poetry (and poetic drama) is the immediate response to it as poetry. While it is true that the Indian and the European intellectual traditions are different, emerging as they do, each from its own world view and intimately interwoven with it, the two worlds of these traditions ought not to be treated as totally opaque to each other. If an educated Indian is able to read and enjoy the Greek tragedies and Tolstoy in English translations, which is the only way for most of us who have neither Greek nor Russian, we can safely assume that English readers (both within the culture and outside it) who have no Sanskrit can appreciate and enjoy Vyāsa, Vālmīki and Kālidasā, through translations of their works into English. With numerous hurdles to negotiate in the course of translations, it is a matter of satisfaction that translations 'can carry over' much of the power and beauty of the original. The notes and annotations are simply a means to enable the reader to explore the depths and reaches of Kālidāsa's art and taste its full flavour—*Rasa.*

The translation of *Śakuntalā* in this volume first appeared in *Kālidāsa: The Loom of Time* by Chandra Rajan (Penguin Classics, 1989). It has been revised.

Introduction

> I give power and knowledge to him I love:
> I invest him with Holy Power:
> I make him a sage, a seer.[1]
> (Ṛgveda, 10: 125:5)

Kālidāsa's status as the major poet and dramatist in classical Sanskrit literature is unquestioned.

> Once, when poets were counted, Kālidāsa occupied the little finger; the ring finger remains unnamed true to its name; for his second has not been found.[2]

That is high praise. Kālidāsa's accomplishment is distinguished not only by the excellence of the individual works, but by the many-sided talent which the whole achievement displays. He is a dramatist, a writer of epic and a lyric poet of extraordinary scope. In his hands the language attained a remarkable flexibility, becoming an instrument capable of sounding many moods and nuances of feeling; a language that is limpid and flowing, musical, uncluttered by the verbal virtuosities indulged in by many writers who followed him; yet, remaining a language loaded in every rift with the rich ores of the literary and mythical allusiveness of his cultural heritage. By welding different elements to create new genres, his importance as an innovator in the history of Sanskrit literature is clearly established. The brilliant medieval lyric poet, Jayadeva, in praising Kālidāsa as *Kavi-Kula-guru* (Master of Poets), conveys his recognition of this aspect of the poet's greatness. Bāṇa, the celebrated author of the prose-romance, *Kādambarī*, exclaimed.

> Who is not delighted when Kālidāsa's perfect verses spring forth in their sweetness, like honey-filled clusters of flowers?

thus drawing attention to the exquisite craftsmanship of the poet's verse. For nearly two millennia, Kālidāsa's works have been read with deep appreciation, widely commented upon and lavishly praised. It would be safe to assume that the poet enjoyed success, fame and affluence during his lifetime. We sense no hint of dissatisfaction in his works, no sign of bitterness at not receiving due recognition. Yet, we do not possess any information

about him, his life and the times in which that life unfolded and fulfilled itself. All we are left with are a few legends. The poet has drawn a veil of silence round himself so complete that even his real name is unknown to posterity.

No name is affixed to the poems and the epic; they have come down to us virtually anonymous. What information we possess is derived from references to them by later poets[3] and writers[4] and the commentaries written on them, and from inscriptions.[5] The name is met with only in the plays, where in each prologue, the author styles himself as Kālidāsa. Like others in Sanskrit literature, this name is descriptive; Vyāsa, meaning 'the compiler', is the author of the *Mahābhārata*; Vālmīki, 'he who emerged from the anthill (*valmīka*)', of the *Rāmāyaṇa*; similarly Kāli-dāsa means the votary or servant of Kālī. Kālī is time in the feminine (Kāla is time). The concept of Time as a creative principle is as old as the Vedas.[6] We can then translate the name Kāli-dāsa as 'the servant of Time', a phrase that prompts us to explore its significance.

Kāla and Mahākāla are among the many names given to Śiva, the Absolute; the many names given to godhead are descriptive of its different aspects and functions as seen in the world of phenomena and apprehended by the human consciousness. Formless, Eternal, One, Śiva is pure consciousness, the changeless reality behind the manifold changing world that is brought into being by his inherent power or Śakti, cosmic energy. Kālī is one of the many names of Śakti. The names descriptive of the creative power are the feminine forms of the words pertaining to the many aspects and functions of the unitive godhead: Śivānī, Bhavānī, Kālī, Mahākālī, derived from Śiva, Bhava, Kāla and Mahākāla, define the feminine, creative aspect of the One. In iconography this concept is imaged as Ardhanārīśvara, the Lord whose one half is woman. Śiva and Śakti are therefore one indivisible Whole.

The natural consequence of the poet's reticence is that a number of legends have gathered round his name. One of them presents him as a simple, unlettered Brahmin youth of uncommon beauty and grace of manner, who was orphaned at six months and brought up by the driver of an ox-cart. Through devout prayer and worship of the goddess Kālī, he obtained profound learning and the gift of poetry and is said to have assumed the name of Kālidāsa, 'the servant of Time' or 'the servant of Creative Power[a].

a. Taking Kālī, the Mother of the Universe as the creative force.

Legends surround the name and fame of many ancient writers. A popular legend speaks of the transformation of the author of the *Rāmāyaṇa* from a cruel highway robber to a great and holy sage. It is said, that repenting of his misdeeds, the robber performed severe austerities over such a long period of time that his body was buried in an anthill that formed round it. Emerging from it finally enlightened, he assumed the name Vālmīki. The description of an ascetic in Mārīca's hermitage seems to contain an allusion to this legendary happening (*Śat.:* 7:11). Rather than dismissing them summarily as apocryphal, such legends are better read as metaphors for the divine inspiration that is seen to lie behind poetic composition and as underlining that powerful vision and extraordinary felicity of expression that some poets possess more than others. They are perceived as being born again touched by the divine fire; the new name is assumed to indicate this and identifies their initiation into their calling. The legends surround them with an aura of the miraculous that sets them apart as vehicles of the Holy Power of the creative word, *Vāc*.

Some Sanskritists in fixing Kālidāsa's dates, have theorized that his works contain veiled references to his patron, King Vikramāditya, the second Gupta emperor with whom Indian tradition associates the poet, and base their identification of this king accordingly. If this were the case, it would be reasonable to assume that the poet may well have left a few clues about himself, his family and birthplace in his works that we could all then set out happily to discover. But he has not. All this points to something of significance; that it was the poet's deliberate decision to strip his texts of all biographical detail, veiled or otherwise. In its turn, this decision must be seen as indicative of Kālidāsa's attitude to his writing. It suggests that he did not choose to situate it in his individual personality and relate it definitively to his own life and times, but projected himself as a medium, a voice. The poet has effaced the authority of his own voice from his texts. It is open to the reader to see this self-effacement from a metaphysical point of view as a transference of authority to a voice beyond Time, to 'the voice of Silence'[7] that shaped the universe: or to perceive the texts as situated within time and responsive to cultural shifts in the course of time but not fixed in any specific context. The name Kāli-dāsa would relate equally to both meanings of the word *Kālī* in the name: Creative Power and Time.

To look at the first of the possibilities: *Vāc*,[8] the Śakti or inherent power of the Supreme Spirit in the Vedas, speaks through the poet who has constituted himself as a medium. And in so doing, Kālidāsa places himself in the ancient tradition of the Vedic poet-seers who saw themselves as speaking the Word and uttering the Truth. Looking deep within, into the

depths of their consciousness,[9] they saw the light that never was on sea or land, and expressed the vision they discovered there 'for all ages to come'.[10] The Word reveals the unseen through the seen,[11] using the language of metaphor, and links the transcendent with the transient. The poet, Kavi (from which the word *kāvya* for poetry is derived), establishes communion between the two worlds; between men and gods.[12]

The second possibility is particularly useful in the interpretation of Kālidāsa's plays by enabling the reader to adopt readings other than or in addition to the strictly historical one that places them in the framework of the poet's milieu and the poetics that were current in his age. There is more in a great work of art than can be compassed in any single mode of interpretation that sets out to explore its significances.

A classic does not simply belong to its own time. The very definition of a classic implies the recognition that it speaks to all ages, despite the complex ways in which it relates to and reflects the specific circumstances of the world in which it originated. A classic work must carry within itself the potentialities for relevance to future generations of readers in different cultural contexts. The very lack of biographical detail, the self-effacement of the author, frees his texts from a specific context with its own social and literary codes. Drama, which is the most socially-oriented of literary forms, comes across with an immediacy to audiences even when their responses are shaped and ordered by social and literary codes different from those in which it was imbedded. While placing *Śakuntalā* in a particular set of poetics is no doubt useful and interesting as providing a historical *reading*, it is more illuminating and rewarding to see the play's accomplishment as lying in the manner in which it escapes the constraints of those poetics even as it acknowledges them.

II

Kālidāsa's dates have not been established conclusively. Three dates have been put forward, none of them even remotely exact; and spanning centuries:

(i) The second century BCE, the period of the Śuṅga Empire which held power roughly from 184 BCE to 78 BCE over most of northern and central India, ruling from Pātalīputra, the imperial capital (modern Patna). Kālidāsa is believed to have been the court-poet of Agnimitra Śuṅga who ruled as his father's viceroy at Ujjayinī, the second and western capital of the empire. He is the hero of Kālidāsa's first play, *Mālavikāgnimitram*, a romance with a historical basis.

(ii) The first century BCE, in the reign of the celebrated Vikramāditya of story and legend who ruled at Ujjayinī and is believed to have founded the Vikrama era (still used in the country) in 57 BCE to commemorate his victory over the Saka (Scythians) invaders of Malwa. A long and persistent Indian tradition associates Kālidāasa with this monarch, making him Vikramāditya's court-poet.

(iii) The fourth to fifth centuries CE, during the period of the Gupta Empire, in the reign of Chandra Gupta II, who assumed the title of Vikramāditya, or the Sun of Valour, after he had completely overthrown the Saka power in western India.

These dates are discussed briefly in Appendix 1.

It is only too obvious that Kālidāsa's birthplace is not known for certain. Various regions in the country have laid claim to the honour of being the poet's place of birth. It is clear though, from reading his works, that the greater part of his life must have been spent in Malwa (ancient Avanti); and that in the deepest sense, Ujjayinī, of which he writes with such affection and pride, was the poet's own city. 'Indeed, you would have lived in vain', says the yakṣa to the rain cloud, admonishing it not to miss the chance of a visit,

> to Ujjayinī glowing in splendour
> like a brilliant piece of Paradise
> come down to earth with traces of merits
> of dwellers in Paradise returning,
> the fruit of their good deeds almost spent.
> (*Meghadūtam*. 30)

The two poems *Ṛtusaṃhāram* and *Meghadūtam* (vol. 1), reveal an intimate knowledge of the region of the Vindhya mountains. The poet describes the topography of the Vindhyas and the Malwa region with a loving exactitude as if the landscape lay on the palm of his hand. Malwa, in central India (now part of Madhya Pradesh), is watered by many rivers and streams, rising from the Vindhya ranges and draining its slopes and valleys. Malwa's landscape streaked by its many rivers and streams with glades and pleasure-gardens on their banks; dotted with groves and meadows and woodlands stretching along the slopes of the hills; its holy spots and long low hills containing caves overgrown with bushes,[13] stir the poet's imagination and evoke in us the beauty that once was. It may well be that the poet belonged to this region and that Ujjayinī was his place of birth.

Ujjayinī was one of the great cities of ancient India with a continuous history of centuries as the capital of powerful kingdoms such as few cities

possessed; it was during most of its history a cultural and commercial centre. Among its many names were: Viśālā, the-wide and gracious city; Puṣkaraṇdinī, the city of flowers; Mahākāla-purī, the city of Mahākāla (Śiva). Lying at the junction of the two great trade routes of ancient India, the east-west and north-south routes with their network of branches, Ujjayinī grew wealthy and prosperous. The trade routes connected the imperial capital of Pātalīputra (Patna) at the confluence of the Ganga[14] and the Son to various regions within the country; to the Arabian Sea ports such as Broach and Pātāla that carried the extensive overseas trade to Alexandria and Rome; and to the caravan routes extending west through the Kabul valley to the Mediterranean. Ujjayinī was the emporium of its time. The city was long a centre of learning and intellectual activity; an observatory had been built fairly early in its history and the prime meridian passed through the city, making Ujjayinī the Greenwich of ancient India. It was one of the earliest centres of importance for Buddhism, with some of Buddha's first disciples belonging to Ujjayinī; Jainism was well established. Judging from the antiquity and great sanctity of the Mahākāla shrine, it is conceivable that the worship of Śiva was predominant.

Ujjayinī's splendour and opulence are reflected in Kālidāsa's writings. Its mansions and groves, its palaces and pleasure-gardens are described in vivid detail in the two poems in volume I already referred to. The glowing descriptions of the palaces and gardens in the dream-city of Alakā in *Meghadūtam*, as well as those of King Duḥṣanta in *Śakuntalā*, who is a monarch of the mythic past, might have been drawn from those that made Ujjayinī splendid and beautiful in the poet's own times. But it is also likely that the poet was drawing on his literary reminiscences of the epics; some of the details of his descriptions, e.g., of the Yakṣa's mansion and gardens in Alakā and of the Vindhyan landscapes in *Ṛtusamhāram* are self-consciously allusive, but with the jewelled perfection that is all the poet's own.

> And Maya built in the Assembly Hall, a lotus pool peerless in beauty paved with priceless gems and studded with pearl-drops; therein bloomed lotuses with leaves of beryl and stalks of gems; a flight of crystal steps led down to brimming waters translucent in all seasons, stirred by lotus-scented breezes; abounding in many kinds of water-birds, turtles and fishes.... Surrounding the Hall were thick groves, beautiful, dark-blue, providing cool shade with many kinds of great trees ever blooming, redolent of flower-fragrances; and dotted all around with pools of blue waters haunted by wild geese, teals and red geese.
>
> (*Mbh.*: 2:3:23-26)

There are also verbal echoes of passages in the *Rāmāyaṇa* that describe the palaces and gardens of Rāvaṇa's capital, Lankā.[15]

However, Kālidāsa celebrates the glory of Ujjayinī not only for its beauty and wealth, but also because it is a place of hierophany. It is one of the twelve hierophanic spots in the country, where Śiva, the Absolute, descended into Time and Space to abide as a terrestrial presence for the 'salvation of the godly'. Such a city, wealthy and cosmopolitan, possessing a rich culture and a cultivated audience belonging to a leisured class and with a splendid court and merchant-guilds to provide patronage for the arts, would have been the ideal centre for the flowering of drama. Legends speak of the brilliant court of King Vikramāditya, learned, wise and generous, patron of poets and scholars. Some of the great dramas are laid in Ujjayinī, others build their plots round the life of the beautiful princess, Vāsava-dattā of Ujjayinī, daughter of the ruler of Avanti in the time of Buddha.

Though it cannot be stated with any certainty, Sanskrit drama probably developed in Ujjayinī under the patronage of the kings and merchant princes of that region. There is an interesting piece of information in Bāṇa's *Life of Harṣa*[16] where he mentions that Sumitra, the son of Agnimitra, who took great delight in drama, was attacked 'in the midst of actors'. by one Mitradeva and had his head 'shorn off with a scimitar as if it were a lotus-stalk'. Sumitra is called Vasumitra in Kālidāsa's first play (*Mālavikāgnimitram*) and is the fourth Śuṅga emperor of the first century BCE at which time it is highly probable that the capital had been shifted from Pātalīputra in the east to Ujjayinī. We can imagine that an emperor who was an enthusiastic patron of drama might have been present at a rehearsal or might even have been trying out a role himself. Act 2 of Kālidāsa's play, *Mālavikāgnimitram*, opens with a scene in the theatre attached to the palace, where the King and Queen are watching a dance performance by the heroine, Mālavikā, complete with music and other accompaniments. The theatre with its easily accessible costumes and props would certainly have been a most convenient place to plan and effect an assassination of a monarch who would otherwise have been heavily guarded.

This little anecdote in Bāṇa's work provides a possible date for the classical drama as we now have it. Fragments of plays written on palm leaves in the Kushan script, discovered in Turfan, Central Asia, and attributed to Aśvaghoṣa, the Buddhist philosopher and poet, show that the form of classical drama was well established by that time. Aśvaghoṣa's dates have been fixed in the period of the first century BCE to the first century CE. The relative chronology of Aśvaghoṣa and Kālidāsa is disputed; but it is not unlikely that Kālidāsa is earlier than Aśvaghoṣa.

III

The origins of drama in India are shrouded in antiquity. Space does not permit a detailed discussion of the problem here, but some of the influences that directed its evolution might be outlined briefly. Three avenues may be explored: the Vedas, the epics and the dance.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* (The Treatise on Drama) of Bharata, the oldest surviving text of the theory of drama and dramatics, claims a divine origin for itself. It styles itself as a fifth Veda, accessible to all, including those who were precluded from the study of the four Vedas,[17] like women and Sudras; and sets out to instruct through pleasure. Brahmā, the creator, took elements out of the existing four Vedas to create this new fifth Veda known as Nāṭyaveda. Among its aims, as set out in the first chapter are : to represent the ways of the world, both good and bad; to give good advice and provide enlightenment through entertainment; to bring peace of mind to those afflicted with the ills of the world and its many problems. Drama represents a generalized view of the world and the actions of persons divested of particularities of character; it does not deal with individuals and their specific situations and emotions. The chief goal of drama is to produce *rasa*, the aesthetic emotion, evoked by the appropriate mood built cumulatively through not only words, but also by mime and gesture, music and dance, costume and jewellery. *Rasa* is not raw emotion but emotion depersonalised, divested of all the accidents of circumstance; it is emotion re-presented, distilled by art. Sanskrit drama is therefore a blend of many elements: verse and prose, dance, music and spectacle. The *Nāṭyaśastra* treats poetry, music and dance as one art. The words *naṭa* (actor, dancer, mime), *nāṭya* (dancing, dramatic art) and *nāṭaka* (play) all derive from one root, *naṭ*, to act or represent.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is obviously either a compilation of texts that existed prior to it in one form or another, or a systematic arrangement and organization of a body of floating theories and practices. In its present form it might well be later than Kālidāsa, depending on which century we choose to place the poet in. It is possible that the author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* sat down to compose his treatise with Kālidāsa's plays before him. That a creative writer of Kālidāsa's genius and accomplishment would write according to the book is not very likely; it seems more plausible that a critic and theorist would draw upon the work of a great writer to formulate his theories.

Though we might be grappling with uncertainties because there is no concrete evidence to draw a clear line of descent from one to the other,

the origins of drama could be traced back to the Vedas. In the *Ṛgveda* we find a number of poems with dramatic elements in them: dialogues such as the lively debate between Saramā, the hound of heaven and the Paṇis,[18] traders or demons of darkness, over wealth or tribute, where promises of friendship and veiled threats of hostilities are traded; the dialogue between Urvaśī, a celestial nymph, and the mythic king Purūrava,[19] which is the distant source of Kālidāsa's second play *Vikramorvaśīyam;* monologues like the declamation of *Vāc proclaiming* her role in the creation of the universe;[20] soliloquies like Vasiṣṭha's,[21] a cry of despair rising out of a profound sense of alienation from the divine presence. In some of the poems in this group there are three or more voices speaking; and a few contain the germ of a story or a cryptic reference to an event that could develop into a plot in the hands of a great dramatist. This is what did happen to the Urvaśī-Purūrava dialogue when Kālidāsa fleshed out the bare bones of the legend (or myth) into a delightful, lyrical play.

The Vedic hymns were chanted and sung by several voices and the presence of a refrain[22] in some suggests a choral element. The rituals themselves of the great sacrifices—and there were many of them extending over days and even longer periods—have a dramatic character because the complex round of ceremonies that accompanied the chanting contained an element of dramatic representation. The rituals are a re-enactment of cosmic events; the re-enactment is the essence of the Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*). It is conceivable that the priests officiating at the sacrifices played the roles of gods (*devas*) and seers (*sādhyas*) in re-enacting the cosmic events. There is mention in Vedic literature of maidens, beautifully dressed and jewelled, singing and dancing and circling the sacred altars with jars of holy water in their hands. A chariot race is mentioned, as well as a contest between a fair Vaisya and a dark Sudra for the possession of a round white skin symbolizing the sun (Light). These imply a certain amount of action that must have accompanied the chanting of the sacred verses and the performance of the rituals: a notion of conflict or contest is also implied, an essential element in drama.

It is suggested that the Urvaśī-Purūrava poem was a 'staged dialogue ... a dramatic substitute for what had originally been the sacrifice of a male in a fertility rite after a sacred ritual wedding',[23] and that the theme of separated lovers derives from this. But it seems that the theme of separation and reunion of lovers also belongs to folk and fairy tale. However, the first part of the suggestion points to the possibility that the vegetation and fertility cults of the ancient world are among the contributing factors in the evolution of classical drama. It is interesting to note in this connection that the

medieval and modern religious drama relating to Kṛṣṇa's nativity and exploits, culminating in the slaying of the cruel Kamsa by Kṛṣṇa, displays a ritual aspect that connects it to ancient vegetation cults. *The Binding of Bali* and *Kamsa's Slaying* are two plays referred to in the literature of the second century BCE; it appears that in the staging of these early religious plays the colours black and red have been used symbolically in the make-up of the actors to represent dark winter and bright summer.[24]

The *mudras (hastas)* or hand-gestures used and the stances adopted during the performance of Vedic rituals (they continue in use even now), were incorporated later into classical drama. Often, the stage-directions in a play indicate miming, and call for a specific *mudra*, as for instance in *Śak.* 6:3, the *kapota-hastaka*. the dove-shaped hand-gesture that conveys adoration or supplication, where the hands are folded together with the palms slightly hollowed and not touching but with the tips of the fingers and the base touching, so as to form the shape of a dove. However, *mudras* and stances are not only part of the ceremonies accompanying Vedic liturgy, but also of priestly rituals in temples; for instance, the waving of lamps before the deity goes through an intricate sequence of movements. They also belong to the grammar and vocabulary of the dance, which is closely associated with temple-worship and with Śiva who is imaged in stone and metal as Naṭarājā, the Lord of Dance.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* assumes the close association of Śiva with the performing arts. For Bharata, in his dialogue with Brahmā, the Creator, speaks of having witnessed the dance of Śiva (Nīla-Kaṇṭha, the blue-throated god), 'full of feeling' and expressive of the sentiments of *śṛṅgāra* (love) conveyed through graceful sequences of movement and gesture.[25] And Śiva, highly pleased with the performance of the two plays, *The Churning of the Ocean (Amṛtamanthana)* and *The Burning of the Triple City (Tripura Dāha* or *Tripura Vijaya)*—the latter play is mentioned in *Meghadūtam* (58)—composed by Brahmā himself and performed by Bharata and his troupe on the Himalayas against the natural scenery of its 'beautiful caves and waterfalls',[26] instructs his disciple Taṇḍu to teach Bharata certain dance-sequences that formed part of the 'preliminaries'[27] in the staging of a play. This statement in the *NS* suggests the coming together of two traditions in the performing arts or the influence of one upon the other.

The 'preliminaries' *(pūrva-raṅga)* consist of a series of religious ceremonies with prayers and offering of flowers to the deities, performed with specific gestures and sequence of movements to the accompaniment of music. It serves a dual purpose, framing drama in a religious setting and providing the audience with some entertainment. Sanskrit drama is secular,

but there is a religious and ritual dimension to it; the association with Śiva also provides the quality of prayer to what is basically secular drama, as evidenced by the invocation at the beginning and the benediction or *Bharatavākya*, the stanza spoken by the actor at the end of a play.

Bharata is obviously an assumed name. The Bharatas were originally the rhapsodes[28] or bards of the powerful Bharata tribe celebrated in the Ṛgveda. A bardic ancestry is therefore implied and presupposed in the name. Later, the word came to signify an actor. The bardic tradition of the epics had a strong influence on the development of drama. In the *Mahābhārata*, bards recite the story of the Great War and the events that led up to it to Janamejaya, the great-grandson of Arjuna, the foremost warrior in that war. And the recital takes place at the performance of a great sacrifice. The story of Rama and Sita is recited by their sons Kuśa and Lava (kuśī-lava),[29] at their father's court before they are recognized and acknowledged. Recitations of stories may have taken the form of several voices delivering different parts of the narrative or of speaking the parts of the different characters and accompanying their recitals with appropriate gestures and facial expressions. Recitations of the epics continued to be popular forms of entertainment (and instruction) for centuries and have continued right to this day in temples and village squares.[30] The epics stand solidly behind classical literature in both drama and the long poem (*mahākāvya*). The plots of several plays and poems are taken from them.

Dancing figures found at Mohenjo Daro[31] point to the antiquity of the dance as an art-form in India. The flexion of the torso of the male dancer, and the stance, the pert look and hint of a smile worn by the little metal statuette of a dancing-girl, right arm on the hip, left arm loaded with bracelets, legs slightly bent at the knees, resemble stances and facial expressions that are still part of the language of the classical dance. The dance is an art-form that blends the lyrical and narrative modes, conveying them through mime and gesture articulated within the metrical pattern of the footwork. The dance also provides the elements of ritual and stylization to drama.

It would appear then that many of the elements of drama were already in place at a very early time, perhaps by the middle of the first millenium BCE, at the time of Pāṇini, the great grammarian who was also a poet. With various traditions converging around this time: the literary tradition of the Vedas and epics, the popular and folk play traditions centering perhaps round vegetation rites and festivals such as sowing and harvesting, the ritual drama and the dance with its story-line, it was inevitable that drama as we understand it should have been evolving into its final form.

The moment was ripe for the emergence of a new art-form, the drama. All that was needed was the man of genius who could weld the different elements at hand to create the *nāṭaka* as we know it (a term loosely translated into English as a drama or play).[32] In the prologue to *Mālavikāgnimitram*, Kālidāsa names his predecessors Bhāsa, Saumilla, Kaviputra 'and others'. While we shall never know whether one of these named or one of 'the others' who might have come earlier, was the author of the first play, we can be certain that in Kālidāsa's hands, drama reached a high peak of achievement.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is a compendious treatise on practically all the literary aspects of drama and all matters relating to the theatre, from the construction of the playhouse or *nāṭyamaṇḍapa* to audience-response.

Chapter 2 of the text gives us a general idea of the ancient Sanskrit theatre but we cannot claim to have a clear and accurate picture of it in all its details, because some passages are not very clear in their meaning and certain technical terms are variously interpreted by scholars.

> The *nāṭyamaṇḍapa* (playhouse) should be designed in the shape of a mountain cave, have two ground-levels, small windows, and be free from gusts of wind (drafts), so that the voices of the actors and singers as well as the sound of the musical instruments will be resonant.
>
> (*Nāṭyaśāstra:* 2:80-82)

The 'shape of a mountain cave' is an interesting detail, because not only does it reveal an awareness of the acoustical properties of structures but it also suggests that originally shows and spectacles and even plays might have been presented in cave-theatres.

The playhouse was built of close-set bricks of fine quality, on level ground, and faced east. The walls were plastered and then whitewashed; the inner walls were covered with beautiful paintings of sinuous, meandering vines and of men and women enjoying themselves. It is clear that Bharata intended the playhouse to be not merely a place of entertainment but one with aesthetic appeal. Carved figures of elephants, tigers and snakes and statues (on pedestals?) were required to be placed at different spots in the theatre. Architectural features and details were both functional and decorative: mouldings and supports in decorative woodwork are mentioned; ornamental turrets, balconies, railings, roundels and pedestals, niches, brackets, lattices, ornamental windows (*gavākṣa:* shaped like the eye of a cow) that were mechanically operated are some of the details of interior decoration mentioned.[33] Pillars are described as raised at different levels and beautifully carved with figures of women by the side of trees;[34] these

remind us of the carvings and sculptured figures of *yakṣis* and *vrkṣakas* (tree-divinities) at Bharhut, Sanci and Mathura.

The text mentions three shapes of playhouses: oblong, square, triangular, and some verses suggest that a type of thrust-stage might have been in use. Three sizes are also mentioned. But Bharata strongly recommends that the medium-sized playhouse of 96 feet by 48 feet is the most suitable, because: 'in a larger playhouse, the voice will not carry far; it will lose its quality of tone and become weak and indistinct; and due to its large size the subtle play of expressions on the face that are the means to convey the emotions and produce the *rasas* will not be seen clearly by the spectators sitting towards the back' (*NS.* 2:28-30).

The playhouse was divided into two equal halves, the auditorium and the stage with the greenroom behind it, each 48 feet by 48 feet, if we take the medium-sized playhouse as the model. The auditorium had seats of brick and wood arranged in rising tiers 'like a staircase'.

The stage was raised 27 inches off the floor of the auditorium and demarcated into the front stage which was the acting area for the most part and the back stage where the musicians and drummers were seated. Jewels and precious gems were placed underneath the stage during the building of the playhouse according to prescriptions based on their auspiciousness. A wall with two doors, one for the entry and the other for the exit of actors, separated the stage from the greenroom. A curtain of rich material hung before the doors; off-stage effects might have been produced either in the space behind the curtain or on the back stage where the musical ensemble was seated, e.g. Hamsavatī's song and the bards' praise-songs in Act 5 of *Śakuntalā;* the mystic voice in Act 4 that announces to sage Kaṇva that his daughter was pregnant with Duḥṣanta's son.

There was little or no scenery, and a minimum of props made of light materials were used. Language, therefore, became very important as in the Elizabathan theatre; the imagery painted the scenes and much was left to the imagination of the spectator. We see instances of this use of language in Act I of *Śakuntalā,* where the king as soon as he enters describes the fleeing deer and a little later he describes in detail the outskirts of the hermitage (1:12:13).

Sanskrit drama clearly reveals its dance-origins; miming is often indicated by the stage-directions. Dance is very much a part of it; the whole of the fourth act in *Urvaśī,* in the Bengal recension, comprises song and dance interspersed with snatches of prose as the king wanders around demented. Even where there is no formal dancing as such, it is clear that

Sanskrit drama leans heavily on dance-technique: the stances adopted by the various characters, their gestures, facial expressions, their very gait and style of walking, belong to the grammar and vocabulary of the dance. There is little that is naturalistic about the dramatic art of the Sanskrit theatre.

Dramatic performances were usually held on special occasions : coronations and other royal events, great weddings, religious festivals and fairs. Private theatres, beautifully decorated, would have existed in the royal palace, mansions of nobles and merchants and perhaps in guild halls. The audience would have been select, comprising the few and fit. Open air performances are also known, which were probably staged in front of temples or in their quadrangles, with large, mixed audiences. There might have been open-air theatres also. Bhavabhuti's play *Mālatī-Mādhava* was performed for the festival of Kāla-priya-nātha (Śiva). But we do not know whether it was staged in an open-air theatre or in the temple-square.

Women played the female roles. Bharata is mentioned as putting it to Brahmā that drama could not be presented successfully without actresses and Brahmā, seeing the point made, created *apsaras* (celestial nymphs) for this purpose. But we find that in *Mālatī-Mādhava* the director (*sūtradhāra*) and his assistant take on female roles.

Certain stage-directions are conventional: 'enter with a toss of the curtain' indicates hurry, excitement, agitation; 'walk around' and 'turn around' indicate changes of location.

Costuming, jewellery and hair styles were important, serving as the means of ethnic, regional and hierarchical signification; they also represented emotional states: for instance, 'Enter the King *costumed* as suffering from remorse' in *Sak.*: 6:5, and 'Enter Śakuntalā with her hair done in a single braid' to signify the grief of a woman separated from her husband (7:21).

Colour was used symbolically, both in the costumes and the make-up. Faces may have been painted, as is still done in the Kathakali and Chhau dance-forms. Four main colours, blue, red, yellow, black and four combinations of these, grey, gold, green and pink, appear to have been in use; other colours are also mentioned as blends of these.

Masks may have also been in use. The use of masks that rightly belongs to ritual drama, is significant, because the mask covers and transforms. It signifies the de-personalization of the actor and his transformation into a fictive character. The actor steps into the role assigned to him the moment the mask or make-up and the costume are put on, to *become* the character.

All these external trappings of a character immediately convey a great deal about the play and the story to the least educated and unsophisticated among the audience.

Stylization in speech and acting, the symbolic use of colour, the use of masks (made up of paint and also of materials) and of dance and miming, all serve to distance the play-world of drama and separate it from the everyday world. The classical drama of India uses Prakrits or regional dialects as well as Sanskrit, which is spoken by Brahmins, kings and high officials. Women (even queens), children and the court-jester (*vidūṣaka*) speak Prakrit; low characters like the fishermen and policemen in Act 6 of *Śakuntalā* also speak in dialect. This provides Sanskrit plays with a rich variety in speech, but it is not possible to make the differentiation between the classical language and the dialects and between the dialects themselves in translation.

To what extent classical drama was a form of popular entertainment is hard to say. The relatively small size of the playhouse, whose seating capacity could hardly have exceeded four hundred, makes the Sanskrit theatre an intimate one with a small, select audience. The open air theatres would have drawn a much larger and mixed audience but nothing definite can be said on this point.

IV

Turning to lyric poetry, the line of descent seems somewhat clearer than in drama. The *Ṛgveda* contains a few true lyrics of which *Rātri* (Night)[35] and *Araṇyānī (The Spirit of the Woods)*[36] are notable. The hymns to *Uṣas (Dawn)* and the lovely marriage hymn, *Sūryā's Bridal*,[37] are lyrical in tone. The *Atharvaveda* contains the beautiful *Pṛthivīsūkta (Ode to Earth)*.[38]

Kālidāsa's poetry forms a kind of watershed in the vast terrain of classical literature, within which his finest poem, *Meghadūtam*, has a special place, standing as it does at the end of a long tradition of the narrative-dramatic poetry of the first millennium BCE and at the head of a new tradition of lyric poetry.[39] His earlier poem, the epic, *Raghuvaṁśam*, brings to a close the great epic-saga tradition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, with its emphasis on action, its exalted and heroic theme, its alternating narrative and dramatic styles and its story-within-story structure. But it also differs from that tradition. The poet places his own unique stamp on this new epic. The epic *Raghuvaṁśam (Raghu's Dynasty)*, has the exalted theme: the rise and fall of an empire, the greatest of the solar dynasty; the lives and exploits of heroes, chiefly of Raghu, the most exalted of these heroes. He is portrayed as the ideal blend of a conquering warrior and a just and

compassionate king. The epic lays out the ideal of kingship and holds the mirror up to princes. But it is more in the nature of a chronicle; character is not pitted against character; there is no play of opposing forces. Built on righteousness and the heroic valour of warrior-kings, the dynasty goes through a series of rulers of little note and no achievement and comes to an ignoble end with the reign of the last ruler, Agnivarṇa, a hedonist with no ideals, unmindful of his glorious heritage and of the interests of his subjects (he puts his foot out of the window of the royal balcony of audience for his subjects to pay homage to), a dissolute monarch who spends his brief life in a whirl of dissipation until it peters out in the silence of death. Secretly consigning his body to the flames, the council of ministers carry on, having consecrated the pregnant Queen and placed her on the throne. The last stanzas of canto 19 are filled with a quiet bitterness and the epic ends abruptly, incomplete and inconclusive.

The *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* have lyrical passages interspersed in the narrative; however, these are not integral but peripheral concerns in the main thrust of the work. *Meghadūtam* (and to a lesser extent *Ṛtusamhāram*) announces a new poetic movement: a lyrical mode laying emphasis on exhibiting subtle emotional nuances rather than on weaving the story-line. As the mind turns inward, the imagination does not engage itself with the clash of external events of feuds and wars and the intricacies of power struggles that lead up to them, as the epics do, but plays delicately on the surface of the inner drama. Action is internalized. *Sṛṅgāra* (love) becomes the dominant emotional mode; the single stanza comes into its own to possess its autonomy. Though the stanzas are units in a long poem, each stanza is exquisitely crafted round one image, one feeling, one instant of experience.

V

The poet has left us seven works : three long lyrical poems, three plays and an incomplete epic. Their chronology is uncertain.

Poems	*Ṛtusamhāram*	The Gathering of the Seasons
	Kumārasambhavam	The Birth of Kumāra *or* The Birth of the Son
	Meghadūtam	The Cloud Messenger
Plays	*Mālavikāgnimitram*	Mālavikā and Agnimitra
	Vikramorvaśīyam	Vikrama and Urvaśī
	Abhijnānaśākuntalam	The Recognition of Śakuntalā
Epic	*Raghuvaṁśam*	Raghu's Dynasty

Ṛtusamhāram is an early effort, perhaps the poet's first that looks forward to the greater work to come; but it is by no means to be read as an apprentice effort. It is an accomplished poem, brilliant in parts. What strikes the reader immediately is the extraordinary particularity with which the world of nature is observed in all its variousness in the changing seasons: parched under the burning sun and devastating drought, revived and renewed in the rains with brilliant colours splashed all around; mellow in autumn's golden plenitude; shivering and pale under the wintry moon's icy glitter. Each season leaves on the landscape its impress of beauty caught in glowing imagery.

The poem is both naturalistic and stylized. What the poet's eye notes with such loving precision is expressed in highly stylized imagery and diction that anticipate the more sophisticated and richly-textured poetry of *Meghadūtam* and the intricate harmonies of *Śakuntalā*. The vision deepens and subtle ambivalences complicate the structure and meaning of the later works; but the keenness of observation of nature and the rich detail with which it is rendered is not excelled in any of them.

The poem is not simply a description of nature; it is an interweaving of the beauty of nature and of woman, with the emotional response to both.

Analogies are drawn constantly between the two worlds, the natural and human. The two worlds interact. Man and Nature together celebrate a joyous festival of love and simple enjoyment; and they grieve together in sorrow.

> People rejoice to see the village bounds
> crowded with large herds of cows lying undisturbed,
> where ripe grain lies spread in heaps on threshing floors
> and the air rings with cries of wild geese and sarus cranes.
>
> (*Ṛtu*: 3.16)

The winter of separation makes young women and the slender jasmines grow pale and wither. In Indian thought, a sharp line is not drawn between the worlds of man and nature. The universe is one ordered whole of which man is a part. Imbued with the Spirit, the cosmic, creative force (Brahma) that is transcendent and immanent, the same life-giving essence that is in man[40], circulates in every part of it. The propelling force therefore in Kālidāsa's poetry is to see nature, not as a setting for man and a backdrop to the human drama, but to perceive it as possessing a life of its own; and as related to the human world in many complex ways. The imagery in Kālidāsa's works, in both the poems and the plays is instinct with this recognition. The philosophical assumptions of his heritage, of India's

civilization are behind it. The metaphysical relationships between the several spheres of existence, the kinship of man and his environment, and to sum it up the fundamental relationship of the part and the whole support the poet's use of language : of myth and metaphor, of word and symbol. To illustrate : whereas in the early poem, *Ṛtusamhāram*[b] , imagery in the form of similes delineates the kinship of Woman and Nature, in the later poem, *Meghadūtam,* the two are identified. Nature, seen as the landscape, becomes a metaphor. The landscape is the beloved.

In the early play, *Vikramorvaśīyam,* this identification is present as well, but with a difference. Woman and Nature (the varied forms of being in Nature, be it peacock and deer, or mountain and stream) are perceived in a haze of confusion brought on by an obsessive passion and uncontrollable sense of bereavement. However, in the poet's last work, *Meghadūtam,* the *oneness* of all life, the kinship of all forms of being is a recognition of the basic metaphysical *oneness;* and this recognition is expressed through Art; through poetry, not through abstract statements. Both Woman and Nature with its teeming energies are seen as the vehicles carrying the creative (and procreative) energies of *Śakti,* Śiva's inherent power.

The mystery of Śiva and his presence is never far from any of Kālidāsa's works. In his works, the poet is revealed as a devotee of Śiva and Devī (Śakti). This does not imply however, that the poet is sectarian or narrow in his religious views. Far from it. A rigid sectarianism is something that comes later in Indian religious thought and *praxis.* It should be kept in mind that Kālidāsa lived and wrote at the close of the first millennium BCE. (See Appendix I for the poet's dates)

Hindu *praxis* recognizes the propensity of the human mind to *image,* be it in wood and stone and metal or in aniconic forms, a sound or a mental image, and accommodates it by formulating the concept of the *iṣṭa-devatā.* A form iconic or aniconic, even a mental image or a sound as in OM (Omkāranātha is one of Śiva's many epithets) is chosen as the object for rites of worship, and as the focus for that single-minded meditation upon the transcendent which is the first step in the path of enlightenment, *jnāna,* and *mokṣa,* release. The form chosen is one that the devotee (*bhakta*) or his guru, perceives as eminently suited to the individual's spiritual temperament and needs.

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b: A detailed description of the structure and imagery of this poem will be found in section IV of the Introduction in Vol. I, *The Complete Works of Kālidāsa,* in three volumes, by Chandra Rajan (Sahitya Akademi, 1997)

Śiva, or more correctly, Śiva-Śakti, the two-in-one godhead is Kālidāsa's chosen form for the adoration of and communion with divinity. The invocations in the plays and the epic are made to the unitive godhead, Śiva-Śakti: in *Śakuntalā* and *Mālavikāgnimitram* to Śiva's eightfold form perceptible to human consciousness; in *Vikramorvaśīyam*, to Śiva as the Primal Being spoken of in the Upaniṣads : and in the epic the indivisible Whole is invoked as the Word. *Kumārasambhavam* is all about Śiva, the yogi and ascetic, and about the sacred marriage of Śiva and Umā[41] (Śakti), which in Saiva mythology and metaphysics initiates the process of creation. *Meghadūtam* reverberates with Śiva's presence.

As the chronology of Kālidāsa's works is uncertain, it is only the sense of a developing pattern in the poet's *oeuvre* that places them in a certain, tentative order. That *Mālavikāgnimitram* is an early play and that it followed *Ṛtusamhāram* is fairly certain. It was probably followed by *Vikramorvaśīyam*, the incomplete epic *Raghuvaṁśam* and *Kumārasambhavam*, also incomplete. *Meghadūtam* and *Śakuntalā* are clearly the last works of the poet. In these, Kālidāsa's vision has mellowed and deepened and the language responds like a finely-tuned instrument to every touch. The unerring choice of 'the word' that expresses perfectly and precisely the intended nuance of meaning[42], and that *oneness* of language and thought that the poet prays for in the invocation to the epic, are fully realised in these last two works.

The narrative poems *Kumārasambhavaṁ*[c] and *Raghuvaṁśam* are defined in Sanskrit poetics by a general term, Mahākāvya, "the great poem". But, they are different : one is mythic and metaphysical, the other is historical in its orientation though much legend might be incorporated in it.

The two poems are different in theme, tone and structure. The epic is an eloquent statement of the imperial theme in all its glory, of the rise and expansion of the divinely descended solar dynasty of kings and its inevitable decay and fall. The vast sweep of the epic embraces in area all the land between the Oxus in Central Asia and the Kāveri in southern India. In time, the epic compasses both pre-and- proto-history coming almost down to the threshold of history itself. Vālmīki's great epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, is encapsulated in the poem with Rama's birth placed at midpoint in the narrative in canto 10 as befitting a hierophany. But in the kind of themes it chooses to articulate in such splendour the epic restricts itself to this world and its concerns; to earthly achievements and earthly joys and sorrows

c. A detailed description of the structure and imagery of this poem will be found in Section V of the Introduction in Vol. I of my book : *The Complete Works of Kālidāsa* : Poems (Sahitya Akademi, 1997).

except for a brief excursion at the beginning by Dilīpa, the founder of the dynasty into Indra's world of eternal light (svarga). The epic is celebratory in tone.

Kumāra on the other hand situates itself in mythic time in a mythic world. The poem is based on the story of a hierogamy as ancient as can be; the story of the sacred marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī can only be taken as the relation of a primal event that happens at the *Beginning*. Since the *Śivapurāṇa* which follows the outlines of the story in the poem very closely, is a late work, the source of the story of the sacred marriage has to be sought in the rich, age-old oral literature of the country. With this story, the poem weaves another ancient story of the war of *deva* and *asura*, god and anti-god or immortals and titans. This again is a tale that tells of another primal event, the search for the elixir of immortality, *Amṛta*, the churning of the ocean to gain it (see Appendix II) and the enmity of *deva* and *asura* that rose because the latter were deprived of the *amrta* though they had laboured hard at the churning.

The characters in *Kumāra* are all divine and semidivine and the action is placed in a world between earth and heaven which partakes of the nature, qualities and even the landscape of both worlds. This world is the realm of Himalaya, characterized in the poem as 'divine regions' (*devabhūmayah*, 5:45). It is peopled by seers and sages, by *apsaras*, *kinnara-kinnarī*, *vanadevatāh* and so on (nymphs, fauns, dryads, sylvan goddesses) and also by hunters and forest dwellers who roam with their wives and sweethearts. This world is the temporal abode of the Absolute, Śiva and the birth place of his *Śakti*, Pārvatī and also of the holy Ganga seated in the tangles of the matted hair of the great *yogi*, Śiva. But it is also haunted by lions and elephants and by soft-eyed does and flamboyant peacocks. The idea of this dual nature of the divine ground that is Himalaya's kingdom is reified in the person of Himalaya himself, who has a twofold nature: animate and inanimate, moving yet rooted firmly, a mountain that is the firm support of the earth yet a being of 'indwelling divinity' (*devatātma*, I : 1) as befitting the role of parent of the Mother of the Universe. Himalaya plunges deep into the ocean depths but his lofty peaks thrust up into the skies, aspiring to worlds beyond. The delineation of Himalaya is the finest in characterization in the poem. The twofold nature of this *persona* is created and sustained through the effective use of language. Words such as lofty, firm, upright, and vast, endowed with strength and substance are employed in their physical and spiritual-ethical meanings. To illustrate: in 3:76, the closing stanza, we have a striking image:

> ...The Mountain
> *strode along* on his way back his body
> lengthening out from great speed...

This is the kind of perception that someone travelling in a line parallel to a long range of mountains might have especially if he or she were going in a moving vehicle. And again in 6:50:

> The Mountain *rose up* at a distance
> carrying his offerings...

Kumāra is a poem of uneven accomplishment. The poem begins on an exalted note and in canto 2 it reaches sublime heights conveying abstruse metaphysical concepts in noble verse. Canto 3 balances the worlds of the ascetic and the erotic beautifully, juxtaposing springtime spreading through the penance groves setting them ablaze with passion (3:23-39), with the *yoga* of Śiva who sits at its heart in profound self-contemplation . Opposing ideals are set against each other. The erotic is contained by being placed in a context of discipline and self restraint. The verse displays the delicacy and refinement of feeling that Kālidāsa invariably brings to the delineation of *sṛṇgāra*, the mode of love, which is seen here operating in the world of nature and not in the human world. The canto closes on the note of rejection of one of these two opposing principles and is balanced symmetrically by the last stanza in canto 5 where the rejection is changed to acceptance. Many years appear to pass between cantos 3 and 5 and in that period of time Pārvatī has become the great *yoginī*, the appropriate counterpart to the great *yogi*, Śiva. She is in essence now Satī who abandoned her body in the fires of *yoga* (*Kumāra* I.21). The closing stanza of canto 5 is one of acceptance of woman and the principle of love.

Kumāra is in an ultimate sense the articulation in poetry of a metaphysical concept; the concept of the descent of The Timeless into Time-and Space; of the One, ungendered, into duality as Śiva and Śakti, represented iconographically as *ardhānarīśvara* (the lord whose half is feminine); of the mystery of Being-Becoming *(Bhava-Bhavānī)*. The myth of the hierogamy contains the metaphysical concept that has to be translated into metaphor to come alive. And the poem self-consciously introduces a metaphysical element into its poetry by the use of such terms as *akṣara* (imperishable, 3:50); self-born (*ātmayoni*, 3:70); the World's Refuge (*jagatśaraṇya*, 5:76); *Vīsvamūrti* (the World's Form or universal form); the World's Self (*visvātmā*, 6:I). And the blend of the mythic, and the metaphysical with story and legend is accomplished effectively in the first five cantos. It fails however in canto 8 where the attempt to speak of the mystic union of Śiva and Śakti in narrative poetry is nothing short of a total fiasco. The mystery

dissolves and vanishes into the thin air of disappointment. The union of the divine with itself can only be suggested, not stated; and definitely not be spelled out in explicit detail as it is in canto 8.

Not only is this long poem uneven in its accomplishment, it is also a problematic work. Both *Kumārasambhavam* and *Raghuvaṁśam* that probably followed its writing are incomplete. They might be viewed and discussed as "fragments" (a very legitimate and critically valid term). The material that the poet has at hand, on which he works to create the poem *Kumāra* is intractable. It is an uneasy mix of several components : the mythic, the metaphysical and the story-element which results in certain artistic failures. Whatever the 'intention' of an author might have been, a work can only be considered on the basis of its accomplishment. A work of art does not and it need not proceed on lines that the author might have originally planned. Often a work of art proceeds on its own impetus taking a direction that might not have been part of the original, intended plan. There are many intangibles in the process of literary creation. The creative imagination often makes choices changing, rejecting, as it works on the mass of material which it is shaping into a work of art.

There is a fascination for a critical reader in following the poetic imagination even when it appears to be wayward. And unfinished works have a charm. The unpredictability makes a work open-ended, problematic; it teases the reader into thought. This is seen at work in the epic.

Formally *Raghuvaṁśam* is a finished poem. But in aesthetic terms it is not. It is open-ended in much the same way as *Meghadūtam* is. The term open-ended is used advisedly. In a real sense the great solar dynasty collapses suddenly. When the last monarch, Agnivarṇa burns himself out in wild dissipation and is secretly burned on the funeral pyre in the palace gardens with no pomp, no ceremonial mourning and none of the trappings of royalty as one might expect, the royal priest and ministers place the sorrowing widowed queen consort 'who bears within her womb', a child as 'the earth bears a handful of seeds to sprout in time', on the lion throne and consecrate her as the ruler. She rules her husband's kingdom 'in undisputed sway (*avyāhatājñā*) with the aid of the hereditary ministers', while the subjects wait in eager expectation for the birth of her child.

Many questions rise inevitably in the reader's mind as they do in the reading of *Meghadūtam*. The lines referred to above which come at the end of canto 19 suggest that the queen ruled as regent for the unborn heir. Did she continue on the throne? Was the child born in its proper time? Was it a son? If not, what then? The poem (or epic, as it is sometimes called)

chooses not to provide any answers. Again like *Meghadūtam* it is *open-ended*; inconclusive. And like the finer poem, *Meghadūtam*, it offers only hope as consolation, but no certainties. As in life, so in Art.

VI

The works of Kālidāsa with the exception of the epic, *Raghuvaṁśam* reveal the presence of certain features in common that are an integral part of the structure and shape that structure. Folk and fairy tale elements and the 'curse', an important motif full of significance are present in some of the poet's works. This motif makes a brief appearance even in the epic. A notable feature however is the employment of several 'worlds'. The poetic material and the dramatic action are distributed spatially in several areas of *experience* and touch upon different levels of consciousness. They are placed in different regions, as for instance the 'green world' of Nature in forests and hermitages, or the 'gilded world' of the Royal Court, or in mythic regions, the 'golden world' of the parents of the Universe, Mārīca and Aditi in *Śakuntalā*. These several 'worlds' might complement one another or stand in contrast. The actions might parallel or mirror each other.

In the early poem *Ṛtusamhāram*, the poem lays out two worlds; the small world of the lover and his beloved, intimate, but not exclusive, set within the larger world of Man and Nature. In the early play *Mālavikāgnimitram* the play lays out the two worlds of love and politics. We see juxtaposed the world of romantic love and palace intrigue and the world of power politics and intrigue of princes, as we shall see later in a detailed discussion of the play. *Vikramorvaśīyam* has several worlds interacting. The long, narrative poem, *Kumārasambhavam* moves in several worlds within the cosmic, mythic world of Śiva and Pārvatī.

The epic *Raghuvaṁśam* uses a different structural pattern. The arrangement of the epic material is sequential, chronological. Vast in sweep, extending from the Oxus in Central Asia down to the pearl fisheries at the mouth of the Tāmraparṇī in the southernmost part of the land, the narrative spans centuries.

In the poet's two last works, *Meghadūtam* and *Śakuntalā*, these several "worlds" and their intricate interplay, their symbolic significance and their role in projecting the poet's concerns and his vision are seen most clearly.

In *Meghadūtam* three worlds are laid out. At the world's summit, on holy Kailasa instinct with Śiva's divine presence, is Alakā, the Earthly Paradise; here below, are the worlds of nature and of human experience;

suspended in between as it were is situated the elemental world of the rain cloud which mediates between the natural and the divine worlds. For the rain cloud belongs both to the natural world and the divine order that sustains it, as the poem makes clear.

Alakā is the world of the poem's protagonist, the yakṣa and his beloved wife, the yakṣi referred to simply as "she". They have no names because they stand for *Everyman* and his wife.

Alakā is a world created by our dreams and desires where Time stands still and whose ways are untrodden by the unimaginative; where sensual music fills the nights to overflowing under the moonlight (*Megh*: 7,68, 72). No other work of the poet reveals more clearly the blend of the erotic and spiritual that characterizes Śiva-mythology and is reflected in Kālidāsa's work; a mystic feeling for the transcendental combines with a sensuous feeling for beauty in Woman and Nature to give his poetry its distinctive quality.

The action of the play *Śakuntalā* moves out of the 'green world' of Nature, set apart and centring round the heroine who is presented as the Lady of Nature, into the 'gilded world' of Duḥṣanta's palace and pleasure-gardens, and finds its resolution in yet another world – a higher world that is inaccessible to ordinary mortals and which partakes of the quality of timelessness because it is presided over by Mārīca and Aditi, whose origins *are* before the world ever *was*; a world that is the creation of art to be held against the insistent, pushing realities and pressures of the actual world. The movement out of the green world is accomplished with much reluctance on the heroine's part. When she disappears from view behind a line of great forest trees, the green world, magical, vanishes too. I use the word 'magical', advisedly because a magico-sacral aura surrounds the deer that lures Duḥṣanta into the depths of the forest. The blackbuck is a sacred animal in the Vedas. The image in 1:6 of Pinākī (Śiva) is resonant with mythical allusiveness. The myth alluded to refers to the destruction of the Sacrifice of the Gods by Śiva who was enraged at being denied his share in it. The Sacrifice (*Yajña*), out of fear of Śiva's arrow, flew up into the sky in the form of a deer; Śiva, aiming his arrow at the fleeing deer, decapitated it and its head became the star *Mṛga-Śiras* (deer's head).

When Śakuntalā leaves the hermitage and the green world vanishes, what remains is an empty desert, for she is the Lady of Nature. Attempts made in Act 6 to restore this world and all the happenings of the initial meeting of Duḥṣanta and Śakuntalā that led to their love and union fail. The re-enactment of the events turns into a mirage. The image of the mirage (6:16) ought to be linked with that of the empty desert. The representation

of that magical world with all its details, the blossoming trees and vines, the full-flowing river, the mating deer and pairs of geese on the river-bank, rendered with dead accuracy by the amateur painter and praised by a pair of art-critics belonging obviously to the school of realism, remains just that – lifeless. The illusion that Duḥṣanta strives to transform into the living presence of the beloved whom he has spurned is shattered by Māḍhavya's caustic wit to which nothing is sacred.

No overt comment is made about the relative merits of these several worlds, nor is a stark contrast drawn between one and the other, for it is not characteristic of Kālidāsa's poetic vision to see experience in simple black-and-white terms.

Different planes of consciousness are touched upon in these two works: dream and awakening; delusion and loss of memory; disorientation where the mind whirls around unfocussed (*bhrama*); recollection and recognition. Interesting observations are made about a state of mind where recollection stands on the pre-conscious threshold, inhibited from stepping over the thin line drawn by the conscious mind acting as censor for whatever reason, to produce uneasiness and perplexity, until some incontrovertible, tangible fact breaks the barrier down. We refer to such passages as the following: the beloved, distraught, forgetting the melody no sooner had she composed it; hovering uncertain between waking and dreaming "a day-lily on a cloudy day neither open nor shut" and nervously pushing back her tangled braid off the curve of her cheek, (85, 89, 91). In *Śakuntalā*, at the beginning of Act 5, we see Duḥṣanta restless and disturbed after listening to the song in the background, but not knowing why. He does not relate the sadness ineffable that falls all of a sudden like a shadow over his heart, to the memory of an event in his present life, the marriage to Sakuntala – but to one in some former life, whose memory lies buried in the unconscious. The stage-direction at this point directs the actor to portray a state of bewilderment, disorientation – *paryākula* (*Sak.*: 5.9). At the close of the act, Duḥṣanta again expresses the nagging doubts that cloud his mind and we leave him in a state of brooding uncertainty.

In both works, at certain points, the line between the real and the imagined or visionary worlds is hazy and wavering. In the play, in the portrait-episode (*Śak.*: 6.15-24), the real and the imagined fuse. It needs the caustic comment of the realist, Māḍhavya, to break them apart and demarcate them into separate areas. To him, the line between the real and the illusory (not the imagined) is hard and clear and on its farther side lies madness, to which the king is perilously close, as he, Māḍhavya, views the situation.

This is especially true in *Meghadūtam.* Perceptions of reality and illusion fuse as the actual world and the imagined worlds are interfused. The poem, cast in the form of dream vision teases us into thought, into asking what the real theme of the poem is. Is it only the exteriorization of a yakṣa's dream of love and longing? Or is it also the realization in language, of the poet's vision of Beauty (that is also Truth) which he seeks and sees everywhere, but only in fragments, not in that perfect *wholeness* which he seeks?

> But alas! O cruel one! I see not
> your whole *likeness* anywhere in any one thing.
> (*Megh.*: 103)

It is the poet's passionate cry that the whole is cruelly denied to him even as a *likeness*, an image, a reflection. Is the poet not anguishing over the barriers that confront human vision and limit the imagination?

VII

Yakṣas and yakṣis are ancient divinities belonging to the cults and cultures of the oldest inhabitants of the land. Envisaged as centres of powers in Nature out of which flowed all the rich blessings of life, they were personified and worshipped as deities of groves and waters that they guarded. Temples as well as small village shrines were built for their worship (*Megh.*: 25). Divinities of the sacred grove and indwelling spirits of the great forest trees are invoked in the play to bless Śakuntalā on the eve of her departure for her royal husband's home; and they bestow rich gifts on her and pronounce their blessings for her safe and pleasant journey (*Śak.*: 4.7, 13). In *Meghadūtam*, tree-goddesses are described as sharing the grief of the speaker (106).

As forces of Nature associated with life and fertility and guardians of sacred groves and pools, yakṣas and yakṣis would have probably figured in folk and fairy tales. In the *Mahābhārata* saga, which is a vast amalgam of many elements which include popular tale, folklore, and fairy tale and legend, there are episodes where the Pandava heroes encounter yakṣas guarding pools, one of which relates to Kubera's pool of golden lotuses. Men of great stature, power and valour, and women of uncommon beauty and grace met by the heroes of epic and romance are often asked with admiring wonder if they are beings of divine origin: yakṣa, gandharva, apsarā.

Apsaras, born of the Waters, the waters of creation (see note 8), are, like yakṣa-yakṣis associated with life and fertility and seen as beneficent powers. In the earliest mention of Śakuntalā in Vedic literature, she is

described as an apsarā who conceived and bore the great Bharata at a place called Nāḍapit.[43] In the epic, which is the direct source for the play (see Appendix III), Śakuntalā is not an apsarā herself but the daughter of one and she is presented as such in the play. But Kālidāsa does not let us forget that the heroine is not wholly of this mortal world of ours. She belongs to two worlds, sharing in the qualities of her parents who belonged to two different worlds; invested with Nature's beauty and spontaneous creative energies as well as its holiness, and inheriting the ability for ascetic control that makes her a striking presence in Act 5, though she speaks few words.

Abandoned at birth, Śakuntalā is looked after by birds (Śakunta) that encircle her protectively so that she remains unharmed until the sage Kaṇva finds her and names her Śakuntalā because she was first adopted in a sense by the birds who cared for her. She is portrayed as the Child of Nature, or the Lady of Nature, kin to all forms of life in the sacred grove. Says Śārṅgarava, hearing the cuckoo's song:

> Kin to her during her woodland sojourn
> the trees now give her leave to go.
> (*Śak.*: 4.12)

This aspect of Śakuntalā's personality ought to be kept in mind. She brings to the king something of significance that is lacking in his life. Duḥṣanta's childlessness, referred to indirectly in Act I in the blessings pronounced by the anchorite, and emphasized in Act 2, is a metaphor for barrenness of more than one sort. I might venture to characterize it as spiritual barrenness. Duḥṣanta is led by the deer into Śakuntalā's world, the 'green world' of nature possessing plenitude, fertility, beauty and grace, and holiness. Later, he is led into yet another world, the 'golden world' of Mārīca and Aditi which appears to be the world of nature perfected. Duḥṣanta's narrow and enclosed world of the gilded court, circumscribed by the round of royal ceremonies and pleasures, is thus expanded by virtue of his encounter with Śakuntalā, who is of this world, and yet not wholly of this world.

Fairy-tale elements are present in the poem as well as the play. The sacred pool of golden lotuses guarded by a Genius with specific instructions to follow; the failure to carry them out, the curse and consequent loss of love, status and superhuman powers are characteristic of folklore and fairy tale. The frame story of the lost *Bṛhat-Kathā* as retold in the extant *Kathāsaritsāgara* (The Ocean of Story-Streams) is one such, where the speaker, an attendant of Śiva, is banished from the Divine Presence for wrongdoing and cursed to fall into the human condition. Release from the

curse and restoration is promised at the expiry of a certain term and when certain conditions have been fulfilled.

In the play, to the curse-fall-restoration motif, certain other elements are added: the loss and discovery of the child and heir to the throne and the loss and recovery of the token of identity; a pattern of dream-illusion and of forgetfulness-recollection-re-cognition, all of which are intricately interwoven.

Folk and fairy tale contain irrational elements; they are far from being realistic and are frequently amoral in the attitudes they display. The curses in them are prime examples of this irrationality, for the punishment meted out is invariably far in excess of the wrongdoing; often punishment strikes sudden and swift even in the case of an error committed unwittingly.

These factors should be kept in mind in our approach to and interpretation of the events in the poem and the play: the yakṣa's exile, Durvāsa's curse and Śakuntalā's repudiation by the forgetful Duḥṣanta. The proneness to indulge in strictly realistic, moralistic responses, seen often in critical evaluations of our literature ought to be played down and contained in an overall view which takes into account the several elements from different cultural-literary sources that come together to shape the world of a play or a poem.

The curse itself does not lend itself to any simple explanation. It represents a whole complex of ideas, one of which would be to perceive it as the exteriorization of a state of mind where some exclusive and obsessive preoccupation results in a psychological imbalance. This is the simplistic view held by the sage Durvāsa, who is himself obsessed with a sense of his own holiness and ascetic powers. Some critics adopt an ethical view. Tagore speaks of Śakuntalā's fall,[44] and her redemption through penitence. S.K. De[45] describes the curse of Durvāsa as playing the part of a stern but beneficent providence. But a curse is also a metaphor for the arbitrariness of life; it points to that inexplicable, even absurd element that is of the very essence of life and which is not only beyond explanations and justifications, but beyond all comprehension. Wherever a curse operates the human failing is trivial compared to the enormity of suffering entailed. It concretizes that troubling question which faces every human being at one time or another: Why did this happen? Why does it have to be so? The curse also shapes the answer to that question in the form of that uncertain certitude with which man has to shore up his crumbling faith in order to survive, call it Fate or *Karma* or the absurd or simple acceptance. This is how things are; this is life. Śakuntalā herself blames her own actions in a former life for her unhappiness in the present: the yakṣa's response is acceptance,

with the faith that things have to change for the better. Kālidāsa does not preach; he does not moralize. He shows us life as it is in all its beauty and splendour as well as its inexplicable vagaries which bring misfortunes deservedly or undeservedly. It is significant that the poet does not underline the yakṣa's wrongdoing in the poem. The poem does not describe it; it merely speaks of the curse as a consequence of 'neglect of a *special* charge'; a failure to perform the duties belonging to *one's own office*. The phrases italicized are the two meanings of the phrase *svādhikāra-pramādaḥ*. (The phrase in the text—*svādhikāra-pramāttaḥ*—is the adjectival form). In both versions of the legend provided in the old commentaries, the duties assigned to the yakṣa appear to be a privilege and an honour bestowed on him and his failure to carry them out seems to indicate that he was insufficiently sensible of the high regard and esteem in which he was held by Kubera, his overlord. The golden lotuses are one of Kubera's 'nine treasures'—the sacred pool itself is one of the 'treasures', carefully guarded. Among Kubera's many attendant lords it is our erring yakṣa who is *chosen* to bring fresh lotuses each dawn to offer to the Supreme (Śiva). In this connection it is interesting to note the comment made by the king when he conveys his own awareness of the esteem in which Indra held him and which spurs him to do momentous deeds(*Śak* 7:4). The neglect of duty under the stress of an obsessive love (or passion) that bears within itself the seeds of its own unhappiness and leads to near-tragic consequences seems to have engaged the profound concern of the poet. For we see him returning repeatedly to a consideration of it in varying situations to explore it in slightly different ways in *Meghadūtam*, in *Śakuntalā* and in *Vikramorvaśīyam*. He touches upon it lightly in the epic.

In the poem, the reason for the curse is not explicitly stated, but we infer from the form it takes—separation from the beloved—that it was related to the yakṣa's passionate love for her. The words used in the poem to characterize the yakṣa are significant: *kāmī* (passionate), *kāmārta* (sick with passion), one who whispered in her ear words of no special import, only to touch her cheek with his lips (102). A curse usually deprives the person of the object that was responsible, directly or indirectly, for his or her wrongdoing. But in *Śakuntalā*, Durvāsā's curse neatly phrases the failure of duty (wrongdoing in his eyes), in balanced clauses. The punishment is far in excess of the negligence of which Śakuntalā was guilty; there were extenuating circumstances in her case. What makes the yakṣa's dereliction of duty more serious is that it happened on a specially sacred day known and celebrated as *Hari-Prabodhinī* (110) The Awakening of Viṣṇu, . However, the point that is subtly made in the play is that Śakuntalā was also not

sufficiently appreciative of the esteem in which her father held her and which prompted him to entrust her, rather than one of his pupils with the important duties of welcoming guests and offering them hospitality during his absence from the Hermitage (*Śak*: 1. 12.+2,3). The word used in the text means put in charge', or 'appointed to'. Anasūyā has to remind her more than once of her obligations to perform the duties of hospitality and in fact, it is she and not Śakuntalā who actually performs them when the king arrives at the Hermitage as a guest. A traditional interpretation would treat the disregard to appointed duties in the cases of both the yakṣa and Śakuntalā as a betrayal of trust.

In the other play, *Vikramorvaśīyam*, a double curse is seen operating, both called down on Urvaśī on account of the errors she commits when she is disoriented by her obsessive passion for the king. The initial curse exiles her from heaven, but out of pity it is commuted to a limited period on earth as the wife of the king whom she loves so passionately. To celestial beings, life on earth as a mortal is tantamount to dire punishment. But here the poet balances the loss against the gain, the loss to Urvaśī of her great status in heaven and the bliss of a paradisal way of life, against fulfillment on earth of her love for the king. The second curse takes effect as a consequence of the first when Urvaśī whose love for the king is intolerantly possessive, is seized by jealousy and rushing blindly in anger into the sacred grove of Kumāra forbidden to women, is at once transformed into a vine. The king himself dotes so much on Urvaśī that, leaving the governing of his kingdom to his ministers, he passes his life in a round of pleasures with her, valuing what he describes as 'desirable servitude'[46] to her more than the glory he had gained through his conquering prowess. And when he loses her he is plunged into madness.

In the epic Aja is devastated by the untimely and sudden death of his Queen, Indumatī, whom he loved to distraction. Drowned in inconsolable grief, he cannot come to terms with it despite the wise counsel of the Royal Preceptor, the sage Vasiṣṭha and he barely manages to survive to carry on as king till his son grows up to shoulder the yoke of sovereignty, at which point Aja abandons his body to rejoin his wife in the other world.

The exile theme is found in both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but considering how frequently the motif of a curse-exile-penance following the breaking of a command is present in Sanskrit literature (the Purāṇas or old chronicles have many such examples, and the Purāṇas contain a great deal of folklore and fairy tale), I would hazard the guess that it was a motif deeply embedded in the popular imagination and used in different ways in the floating body of popular tales. But the parallel with Rama's

exile is noteworthy if only because the poet refers to it so pointedly in the opening stanza.

VIII

Some information about the origins of drama (*nāṭaka*) and poetry (*kāvya*) and their development has been provided in the first part of the introduction in sections 1-IV. This information also serves to provide a context for the texts of Kālidāsa. A consideration of the Kālidāsa-corpus has been attempted as well in sections V-VII with a brief discussion of the three long poems, *Ṛtusaṃhāram*, *Kumārasambhavam* and *Meghadūtam* which comprise the first volume in the 3-volume series, *The Complete Works of Kālidāsa.* (Detailed studies of these same three long poems will be found in the introduction that is part of volume 1 mentioned above). Now we turn to a study of the three plays in this volume: *Mālavikāgnimitram*, *Vikramorvaśīyam* and *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, the best-known and best-loved of Kālidāsa's plays.

Mālavikāgnimitram is a delightful drama of love (*sṛṅgāra*) and romance, passion and palace intrigue interwoven in an intricate plot structure. While the main plot built around the love-story and the palace intrigue is pure invention on the part of the dramatist, the play itself is located in historical times during the period of the Śuṅga Empire of the second century BCE from which larger world of concerns and issues political overtones enter and reverberate in the small world, private and enclosed of the idyllic landscape steeped in love and romance. The play's protagonist (*nāyaka*) is the historical monarch, Agnimitra, later the second Śuṅga Emperor (see Appendix I for the genealogical table and dates). The relationship of these two worlds is neatly articulated in Act 5 of the play in the bard's words (5.1).

> By Vidiśā's banks, in royal groves and gardens
> resonant with the melodious cooing of koels,
> you pass the hours of springtime in a transport of delight,
> as if you were the bodiless God of Love, embodied
> and rapt in love for his goddess-consort, Rati, Delight;
> while on the distant banks of Varadā, Bestower of Boons,
> trees deeply marked by chains – tying-posts
> for your victorious elephants, tugging—
> bend down in lowly submission along with the foe
> before the might of your armies, O Bestower of Boons.

This political dimension of the play adds to its fascinating complexity. For his other two dramas, Kālidāsa delves into ancient texts: the Ṛgveda,

the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa and the great epic *Mahābhārata* drawing on the myth and legend contained in them for the material of his plots. However, this inherited legacy that he draws upon provides the barest outlines to the dramatist. He fills out these slender outlines with the riches of his imagination inventing scores of characters and events and episodes to create a unique lyrical drama (*Vikramorvaśīyam*) and one of the finest plays in world literature, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*. In this latter play, his last work, Kālidāsa explores human emotion and motivation with a fine-honed sensitivity and true compassion, delineating it in its highest reaches of nobility, and plumbing the depths of deceit and self-serving betrayal of truth in human conduct.

In *Mālavikāgnimitram*, the action is placed in the small, enclosed world of the antaḥpura (the private, secluded part of the royal palace) of the ruling monarch, Agnimitra who is at the time ruling at Vidiśā, the western capital of the Śuṅga empire, as his father Puṣyamitra's viceroy. Puṣyamitra's court is at the main imperial capital of Pātalīputra in the east, the traditional capital of the great empires of the first millennium BCE : the Magadha, Maurya and Śuṅga empires. The play enacts the love-story of the king and Mālavikā who has taken sanctuary with the Queen Consort, Dhāriṇī, but who is in reality a princess fallen on hard times. There are the usual obstacles to the fulfillment of love but finally everything turns out happily with wedding bells ringing and the queen reconciled to the painful state of having a younger rival in her husband's affections.

But though the action is located in the palace and the private royal gardens, Kālidāsa places the drama in the larger world of politics, war and the power game outside the charming, enclosed, private world of romance, love and pleasure. The palace intrigue, light-hearted, is paralleled by the political intrigue that is deadly serious, threatening the peace and security of the empire on its southern frontiers. And there is trouble on the north-western frontiers as well from the invasions of the Indo-Greek rulers ensconced in the regions on the far side of the river Sindhu and based in Gāndhāra. Mālavikā is the link to the world of war and power politics in the Narmada valley where two princes, subordinate to the Śuṅga emperors are fighting for control of the valley; one the brother of Mālavikā and the other a cousin. Queen Dhārinī's son and heir-apparent to the empire, Vasumitra, is the link to the outside world of the Indo-Greek menace, a not too distant legacy of the invasion of Alexander of Macedon in the third century BCE.

The power game played in the geopolitical world of ancient India and the events taking place in that world do not constitute a sub-plot, because

no action relating to these happenings is actually presented on stage. Three passages, one in Act 1 and two in Act V provide information about the threats to security and integrity faced by the Śuṅga Empire on its southern borders and northern flank (the traditional route of invasion into the country).

The dramatist sketches the political background lightly and does it with deft touches, sometime with just a word or phrase. The inclusion of the geopolitical concerns and dangers makes the play far more interesting and far-ranging than it would be otherwise if it comprised simply the love story of a middle-aged, much-married monarch head over heels in love with a young girl closer to his son's age than his own; and the palace intrigues surrounding it. The meshing of this plot with serious issues looming in a larger world prevents the love story from becoming a bit cloying, even tawdry.

Following the prologue there is an introductory scene, a *miśraviṣkambhaka*[d], consisting of a conversation between two of the Queen Consort's attendants, Bakulāvalikā and Kaumudikā. It introduces the main plot carrying the love-romance theme, conveying to the audience and reader the king's interest in a girl who is merely one of the Queen Consort's attendants; the Queen's best efforts to avoid the very subject of the girl (Mālavikā), and her decision to keep the girl out of her royal husband's sight. A little later when Gaṇadāsa, Mālavikā's dance guru enters, the dramatist gives us a hint that Mālavikā may not really be what she appears to be, a young girl from nowhere found by General Vīrasena in the Narmadā Marches and sent as a gift to his sister, Queen Dhāriṇī. The audience not knowing the story (and the reader as well) would wonder who Mālavikā really is and wait in suspense for the plot to unfold. Now the king enters with the chief minister holding an official communiqué and obviously looking over it with care. Being an official communiqué, obviously its contents must have been perused and discussed by the Chief Minister and Council of Ministers and is now presented to the king for his decision. Because the letter is an important document and very interesting, I shall quote it in full.

Agnimitra (addressing the Chief Minister who had been reading the official letter in his hand) : So, Vāhataka[e], what is on Vaidarbha's mind?

Vāhataka : His own ruin, my lord

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d. Provides information not directly presented on stage about actions and decisions behind the scenes, so to speak.

e. Vāhatava is seen used in some recensions of the play.

Agnimitra: Anyway, let us hear what he has written in reply to our letter to him.

Vāhataka: His reply runs this way, my lord; he writes:

> "Your Majesty most worthy of respect has advised us in the following manner : 'Your uncle's son, Prince Mādhavasena was seized at the frontier by your commandant as he was on his way here to our presence to finalise a matrimonial alliance with us; and taken prisoner. Out of regard for us you ought to release him forthwith with his wife and sister' "
>
> "It is not that you are unaware that this is the course of action followed by princes of the earth towards their kinsmen of equal status. Therefore in this matter it behoves Your Revered Majesty to adopt a neutral stance. As for the prince's sister, she was lost in the confusion that followed the attack. We shall do our best to find her. As for the release of Mādhavasena himself, these are my terms and conditions. Let His Revered Majesty make a note of it".

Yajñasena's communiqué is framed in terse but correct terms, brief, clear and precise. He addresses Agnimitra by the accepted courteous mode of expression, using the word 'pūjya' (most worthy of respect) three times. And there is an air of reasonableness in the communiqué. But the tone is one of insolence. It is not the kind of tone that a subordinate king would use to his overlord, the representative of the suzereign. This implies that the political situation had changed. After the time of Aśoka the Great the vast empire founded by Chandragupta Maurya and added to by Aśoka had been slowly whittled down as a result of the incompetence of his successors. At the peak of its power and greatness, the Mauryan Empire had included all the land from the Hindukush down to the northern part of the Tamil country. The Vidarbhas would therefore have been under the direct control of Pātalīputra, the imperial capital. Puṣyamitra Śuṅga had been hard put obviously to maintain control over the border regions in the Northwest and the South below the river Narmada. Puṣyamitra had publicly executed the last Mauryan Emperor for his failure to protect the integrity and interests of the empire (see Appendix I). However, military coups often bring problems in their wake. Restive vassal states might be sorely tempted to try the strength and control of a newly established regime and see if they can get away with it. New political alliances could form. Neighbouring states (the Bactrian or Indo-Greek states) did display their territorial ambitions in the Northwest. In the verse that follows Yajñasena's letter, (7) Kalidasa evokes the memory of recent events that might have happened in his own

lifetime, or within living memory.

If Your Revered Majesty sets free
the Mauryan Minister, my brother-in-law
now lying in your prison, then in return
I shall at once set Mādhavasena free.

From the above verse (7), it is clear that Yajñasena has contracted a dynastic marriage allying himself with the Mauryan cause; and Agnimitra has retaliated by putting his brother-in-law in prison. In his turn Yajñasena getting wind of the negotiations for an alliance between his cousin, Prince Mādhavasena, already setting himself up as the rival claimant to the Vidarbha throne and Agnimitra, has had the party intercepted at the border and imprisoned Mādhavasena and his wife on their way to Vidiśā with the prospective bride, Mālavikā.

The dramatist is ambiguous at this point. No mention is made as to whether Mālavikā is being offered as bride to the young crown prince, Vasumitra or to the king himself, his father. If it were the former to whom the princess is offered in marriage, the plot structure would be different with a different set of complications. But Kālidāsa knows exactly what he wishes to do and what he has to do to accomplish his dramatic purpose: his view of kingship, the survival of the dynasty without being torn up by family dissensions and consequently of the empire, its integrity and interests; and therefore of the people. The epilogue (Bharatya-vākya) of the play expresses precisely this abiding concern (5:20).

I now fervently pray that my subjects
not be subjected to calamities
natural or created by man;
that no raids, invasions by enemies
and other such disasters fall upon them
while Agnimitra remains their protector.

And here in this matter, it is Dhāriṇī, the Queen Consort who will play a role. Mālavikā, the titular heroine, nāyikā, is a plaything and will remain one like many before her and many who will come after her. But of this later.

Following (7) we see the king furious at his enemy's insolence responding by characterizing Vidarbha's ruler by three derogatory epithets, 'anātmagñyah' (one who 'knows himself but slenderly'); 'prakṛtyamitrah' a natural enemy, and 'pratikūlakāri', one who acts in a hostile manner by siding with the enemies of the Śuṅgas, viz. the last Mauryan Emperor's minister. Seen from Agnimitra's point of view, Yajñasena is a natural enemy

for two reasons: he is a neighbour and an ambitious neighbour at that, and he is allied to the enemy. For all these reasons, Yajñasena is in the position of a 'yātavyapakṣe sthitah' (one who is in a position deserving to be attacked and destroyed). Agnimitra concludes his castigation by issuing orders that the imperial forces stationed in the Narmada Marches and commanded by his own brother-in-law, General Vīrasena attack Vidarbha *as planned*, 'pūrvasamkalpita' (as already wisely decided upon), to extirpate the enemy, 'sammulanāya' (to pull out by the roots).

The analysis of this crucial passage in the play that has a bearing on the Vidarbha problem also indicates something of significance about the characterization of the nāyaka in this play. Agnimitra is a different protagonist from the other two nāyakas, Purūrava and Duḥṣanta (the protagonists in *Vikramorvaśīyam* and *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*). Agnimitra is not a mere playboy with an eye for young and pretty girls. There is much more to him than philanderering. There is another side to him. A careful reading of the play gives us a sense that he has been watching the geopolitical situation in the empire with care. And his council of ministers has also been alert to political developments. Agnimitra has done his homework; he has read the treatises on polity and state craft; he has been in constant consultation with his ministers; and he has skills in handling political issues. And as we shall note later, in Act V we see him displaying statesmanship of a high order. The significant phrase 'pūrvasamkalpitam', used by Agnimitra in his orders to the general indicates that king and council have been fully cognizant of the threat that the Vidarbha problem was to the empire and to Puṣyamitra personally. They had obviously discussed it and decided upon a course of action. Agnimitra and his ministers were waiting for an opportunity, for an excuse to march against Vidarbha.

There is a certain unconscious irony in the observation (8) of the Chief Minister, Vāhataka, though on the surface it sounds almost a cliché. He is commenting wisely upon Yajñasena's precarious position as a king who has recently ('acirāt') ascended (or seized) the throne.

> An enemy newly installed as ruler
> and hence not firmly planted in his subjects' hearts
> is weak, easily uprooted like a tree
> newly planted that has not taken firm root.

A little thought would show that the Śuṅga Empire itself might serve as an illustration of the maxim contained in (8). It had inherited the legacy of incompetence, lack of statesmanship, and *laissez faire*, of the last decades of the Mauryan Empire. The states on the southern border in the Narmada Valley and the Bactrian/Indo-Greek rulers on the northwest would have

been sorely tempted to take advantage of a weakened empire seeking to consolidate its power and control. Agnimitra and his ministers are politicians aware of such threats and ready to nip it in the bud. But, as we shall see presently, they are also statesmen.

Yajñasena lacking political wisdom and blinded by ambition and arrogance plays into the hands of Agnimitra and his council. He loses out. The outcome of the military action in Vidarbha is mentioned in Act 5. A letter from General Vīrasena to his sister, the queen, is mentioned. But its contents are not stated. Information regarding the outcome of the punitive expedition of the Śuṅga armies, the total rout of Yajñasena's forces and his defeat and subjugation is provided in the introductory scene in Act 5. "The Lord of the Vidarbhas has been brought under control by the victorious armies of our lord, commanded by General Vīrasena. His kinsman, Mādhavasena has been released from captivity". An embassy bearing rich gifts has been sent by him (presumably by Mādhavasena) to his protector, Agnimitra, as tribute.

In Act 5 there are two passages of crucial importance; one that conveys the outcome of the punitive expedition in Vidarbha and Yajñasena's total defeat; the second in the form of a letter from the emperor in Pātalīputra, General Puṣyamitra regarding the battle on the banks of the Sindhu and the victory of Prince Vasumitra against the Indo-Greeks who had seized and carried away the sacred stallion.

After the unfortunate events that took place during the fighting on the southern border had been retailed by Kauśīki and Mālavikā's true parentage established, Maudgalya reminds the king that the important matter of deciding Vidarbha's future was pending. A careful reading of the play gives us the sense that the manner of handling the threat on the empire's southern frontiers and the options available for a practical solution in the best interests of the empire and its subjects had been discussed by King and Council and decisions outlined. With the discovery of Mālavikā's royal parentage, King and Council could have easily decided on handing over the Vidarbha throne to Mādhavasena and imprisoning his cousin Yajñasena. Agnimitra and his ministers are politicians first; but they are also statesmen. They opt for diarchy in the Narmada Valley. Agnimitra gives his decision as follows:

> Both princes shall rule, each sovereign
> but separate, holding sway on Varadā's banks... (5:13:1,2)

The river Varadā (modern Wardha), a natural boundary between the two regions of the kingdom (the kingdom is invariably referred to in the plural) is to be demarcated as the political boundary in a divided kingdom. Divide

and rule is an age-old political maxim. It was not a new political concept invented in nineteenth century Europe. Maudgalya returns with the concurrence of the ministers.

> With Royal Glory equally shared
> in a kingdom partitioned, the two princes
> shall bear the yoke of sovereignty, my lord,
> under your benign direction, in peace,
> without fractious contention,
> like two horses controlled by the charioteer.

The ministers state quite clearly who the master is.

Happy solutions to the Vidarbha problem have been found in both the public and private spheres. Divided Vidarbha is no longer a danger to the Śuṅgas; and the princess of Vidarbha for whom the Lord of Vidiśā, Agnimitra has been pining is accepted as one of his junior queens. On the heels of this joyous conclusion to two harrowing problems comes another piece of happy tidings. The young crown prince's brilliant victory over the Indo-Greek cavalry that was challenging Śuṅga supremacy and control in the northwest territories has re-affirmed the integrity of the Śuṅga empire in that area. And in the private sphere it has re-affirmed the supremacy of the Queen Consort, Dhāriṇī. In the last play *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, the king, Duḥṣanta says this of Śakuntalā:

> My wife by right, the firm base of my lineage,
> . . . .
> like the rich Earth sown with seed in due season (*Śak* :6:26)

In her initial greeting of Agnimitra (1:15) a similar image is employed by Kauśikī in characterising Dhāriṇī.

> For a hundred autumns may you be
> husband and lord of the two Dhārinīs;
> both bounteous, both of equal patience;
> one the support of the line
> having brought forth progeny powerful,
> the other the support of all living beings,
> bearing harvests abundant from copious rainfall.

The name[f] itself of the Queen so evocative places her in the same order as the Earth.

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f. Dhāriṇī is derived from the root 'dhr' to bear, to support and sustain. It is applied here to the Earth, the All Supporting base and Sustainer of general wellbeing, and to the Queen, the base and support of the Śuṅga family and dynasty and consequently the sustainer of the empire.

Prince Vasumitra's victory is the crowning success in the lives of Queen Dhāriṇī and the king. Their cup of happiness is brimming over and good fortune in full measure is theirs. And in addition, good fortune has given them a bonus, the desire of Puṣyamitra to banish all misunderstanding in the interests of the family coming together at the sacred Aśvamedha Sacrifice. To celebrate the occasion Agnimitra proclaims a general amnesty for all prisoners in the kingdom. But he pointedly mentions Yajnasena's brother-in-law; *"yajñasenaśyālam ūrīkṛtya"*. This is a master stroke of statesmanship. Overlooking the previous insolence displayed by his 'natural enemy' he has installed Yajñasena in one half of the kingdom of the Vidarbhas. Now, he holds out the olive branch in a gesture of goodwill towards the fallen enemy. But the gesture seems also to be a signal of the Vidiśā monarch's expectations for future cooperation from his erstwhile enemy, the ambitious Lord of the Vidarbhas.

The protagonists in the other two plays are not shown by Kālidāsa in the round as Agnimitra is. As an ardent if fickle lover Agnimitra is presented as the traditional nāyaka of romance. But that is not all there is to him. He is also shown as a shrewd politician and consummate statesman, even a magnanimous one though one might see the magnanimity as only enlightened 'self-interest'. But is that not to be valued in any head of a powerful state whether we look at geopolitics in our own day and age, or in ancient India two millennia back in time? Neither Purūrava in *Vikramorvaśīyam* or Duḥṣanta in *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* is shown as anything other than an ardent lover. Mention is made certainly, usually by the kañcukī (chamberlain) about the king presiding in the Hall of Justice, rising from the judgement seat and coming into the pramadavana wearied by the onerous tasks of governance. But the aspects of kingship in action, the monarch actually involved in the process of exercising the duties of his vocation is not shown in their cases. Duḥṣanta is shown in Act 5 in the Fire Sanctuary acting as both the judge and prosecutor of Śakuntalā. But that is different. As for Purūrava he frankly finds 'servitude' to Urvaśī more desirable than the governance of an empire.

I have discussed the political dimensions of *Mālavikāgnimitram* at some length because very little attention is normally paid to this aspect of the play. The geopolitical world is an overarching construct subtending the small, exclusive private world of exquisite beauty and refinement, of antaḥpura and pramadavana in this play. And to ignore it or treat it lightly, casually, is to deny the play its unique character. The play gains in depth, subtlety and significance by a careful study of this overarching political structuring and the ways in which the larger world where the power game

is played consummately or ineptly as the case might be, meshes with the small, private world of love, romance and intrigue.

And now as we enter this idyllic world in which Agnimitra relaxes after handling the thorny problems of political matters with the help and advice of his ministers, the image used to describe him is that of Anaṅga (the bodiless god of love), embodied (as the king) and rapt in love for his consort Rati (pleasure). An image of rarefied hedonism! (5.1)

The pramadavana is described in imagery very typical of Kālidāsa's descriptions of Nature with which we are familiar from reading his first poem *Ṛtusamhāram.* The beauty of woman and nature are interchangeable. They borrow from each other and lend to each other through the means of imagery that bring the attributes of each to blend in a single image. Instances can be found in Act 3 (4,8), where nature extends its sympathy; (5), where it rivals and outshines the beauty of woman[g]. But there are also dangers lurking in the midst of all this beauty: serpents figurative and fancied creep around. "My lord, my lord, don't come this way, there seems to be a snake around moving with crooked gait", cries Bakulāvalikā standing watching out for intruders while the king and her friend, Mālavikā are inside the bower. Irāvatī, drunk, is moving with slow, weaving steps outside the bower suspecting that something is happening inside the bower. The vidūṣaka's trick faking the bite of a snake rebounds on him when he wakes up from sleep in a fright thinking that the dry crooked twig thrown on him by Nipuṇikā is a snake. Crocodiles lurk, stealthy, in the midst of lovely, blossoming lotuses. Danger and intrigue in the private world mirror those present in the public world of politics.

The beautiful world of decorum, refinement and hierarchical order is enmeshed in a web of intrigue engendered by the passion of the king for Mālavikā. The web is clearly spun by that master of stratagem, the vidūṣaka, Gautama. Gautama is a totally different kind of vidūṣaka from the other two, Māṇavaka (*Vikramorvaśīyam*) and Māḍhavya (*Abhijñānaśākuntalam*). The Queen Consort who is at the centre of the antaḥpura-pramadavana world, endangered by Gautama's wiles and plots is fighting for her status; for her position of supremacy in this world of jealousy. Apart from the elderly chamberlain, Maudgalya, the vidūṣaka is the only male who has entry into this world of ease and luxury and privilege, secluded and shut away from the prying gaze of the world outside. This is a world almost exclusively of women.

The women in Kālidāsa's works are all finely drawn, each an individual

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g. Kālidasa's imagery and the Woman-Nature kinship is discussed in detail in section IV of the introduction.

living and moving within given parameters that are strictly prescribed in a patriarchal society: Dhāriṇī, Auśīnarī, Śakuntalā, Umā (*Kumārasambhavam*), Sudaksinā and Indumatī (*Raghuvaṁśam*) and the "beloved"(*Meghadūtam*). However Dhāriṇī is the most finely-drawn of them all, placed in the somewhat precarious position as she is in, in the harem-situation of the polygamous set-up of ancient India, always under threat on two sides from younger rivals. The threat lies in the possible loss of hierarchical status and needless to say, loss of the affections of the ruling monarch, the husband.

Kālidāsa views the situation of these queens in a polygamous set up with compassion and presents them coping or unable to cope and falling by the way, with great sensitivity. Dhāriṇī copes with the situation she is placed in very successfully, with intelligence and dignity. Irāvatī falls, unable to cope with the situation and takes to drink. Auśīnarī, in the second play *Vikramorvaśīyam*, is noble and dignified like Dhāriṇī, but she is totally rejected at the end of the play; her very existence in the play is erased (*Vik.* 5:22ff). After the coronation of Āyus, Urvaśī's son, as the Crown Prince and Heir-Apparent, his status being quite clearly stated in (22) and in the felicitations of the apsaras to her following this verse, Urvaśī says : "The happiness belongs to us all". These words are almost identical with those of Queen Dhāriṇī in *Mālavikāgnimitram* in Act 5. Urvaśī takes her son by the hand saying: "Come, my darling boy; let us go and meet your elder mother so that you can pay your respects to Her Ladyship". The term "*devī*" is not used here for Auśīnarī because she has obviously been replaced by Urvaśī even if it is only by implication. Now, what is significant is, that at this point, the king, Purūrava stops her and his son, Āyus from leaving. He says "Stay, we shall go together to Her Ladyship". This is in the Sahitya Akademi text edited by Velankar. The other edition by Kale, gives this line to Nārada who says "Stay, you shall present yourself to Her Ladyship at the proper time (or presently)". In the edition that I am following (Velankar's) the king has totally rejected his Queen Consort, Auśīnarī. In *Śakuntalā* the Queen Consort (Devī) is only mentioned; she is never presented on stage. And the junior queen Hamsavatī, corresponding to Irāvatī in *Mālavikāgnimitram* is a mere voice singing in sorrow, grieving over her rejection by the king, Duḥṣanta (*Sak.* 5:1).

There is an important difference between Dhāriṇī and the other Queen Consorts and queens. She is the mother of the heir-apparent, Crown Prince Vasumitra. All the others are heir-less; they have no sons. Mention is also made of her daughter, Princess Vasulakṣmī, a little girl for whom a dynastic marriage of political importance to the empire will be arranged when she grows up. The royal princess of a great empire has a special status; she is not just any princess of whom there would be dozens going around.

Not only does Dhāriṇī hold the trump card as the mother of the heir-apparent who would be the future emperor after his father, Agnimitra (as he was in history), she also has the support of the reigning emperor, General Puṣyamitra and his Council of Ministers obviously, because it is her young son who has been chosen as the guardian of the sacred stallion. He accompanies the Aśvamedha Horse together with a hundred princes. And Vasumitra justifies the choice and proves his worth. He fights gallantly and defeats the Bactrian cavalry that had entered the empire's territory and seized the stallion that was grazing well within the borders of the empire. Puṣyamitra's letter in Act 5 defines the place in precise terms : "*Sindhoh dakṣiṇe rodhasi caran*", that is, "grazing on the southern banks of the Sindhu". Vasumitra rescues the stallion and returns with it to the "sacred enclosure" of the Aśvamedha like Aṁśumat, grandson of the celebrated King Sagara. Sagara was also in the process of performing an Aśvamedha Sacrifice (aśvamedḥa yāga) to establish the power of his empire (perhaps the legitimacy of his accession to the throne). His sacred stallion was also carried away and after many years brought back by his grandson, Aṁśumat. The comparison is significant. The performance of the Aśvamedha sacrifice (Puṣyamitra's third sacrifice in history) establishes his power and control over the territories that the sacred stallion roams through, free and unchallenged. The Indo-Greeks who did challenge his power by seizing the stallion on his own side of the river are defeated. The Indo-Greeks who had been nibbling away at the northwestern frontiers have been pushed back and Śuṅga power proved and re-established. Not only has Puṣyamitra's control been proved once again; the succession has also been legitimised for King Agnimitra and Prince Vasumitra himself. The successful performance of the Aśvamedha Sacrifice is symbolic of legitimacy, control and power. In ancient India these three factors were important in the matter of succession. And in the play Dhāriṇī's status as Queen Consort is secure.

Dhāriṇī is declared (5: 16) by Kauśiki, guardian of Mālavikā and kinswoman of the Vidarbha rulers who had been chafing at the control of the Śuṅgas, as "Foremost of the wives of heroes" (*vīrapatnī sthāpitā dhuri*) and "Foremost of Mothers of Heroes". (*Vīra Sūh*). These are not empty phrases tossed around by bards in royal courts. The bards (vaitālikas) were the public relations officials in the ancient world, functioning as part of the "information department" and propaganda machinery, presenting the most favourable "image" of heads of state. But Kauśikī is a lady of integrity; she is referred to as "the learned Kauśikī" in the play, not part of the king's public relations department. What she speaks carries weight.

However, Dhāriṇī's position is not merely granted to her by the highest in the empire. She *is* the First Lady of the land in a vast empire. But it is by

virtue of her inherent qualities by which she *has* and *keeps* this high status. She is a great lady, of extraordinary nobility and integrity never swerving from the truth.

As her very name implies (Kālidāsa chooses names of characters and titles of his plays with a fine sense of appropriateness), Dhāriṇī is supportive like the Earth; sustains like the Earth. She is the "firm base" of the power and glory of the lineage, the unfailing support of the dynasty as Kālidāsa delineates her in the play. Some of the finest lines in the play are not given to the titular heroine, Mālavikā, but to this great and gracious princess. The noblest sentiments expressed in the play are also hers. Urvaśī's high praise of Queen Auśīnarī would apply well to Dhāriṇī. Says Urvaśī (*Vik.* 3: 12.+):

> Look, Citralekhā, my friend, the word Devī sits most regally on her. For in the splendour of majesty investing her she is no less than Śacī, Indra's Queen.

Dhāriṇī is drawn by Kālidāsa as a lady of extraordinary nobility, sense of duty and loyalty not only to her husband (as expected in the traditional Hindu wife who is known as a pativratā) but to the family and the dynasty which is identical with the empire. Dhāriṇī is imbued with an awareness of her responsibilities as the Queen Consort, the queen crowned with sacred rites by the side of the consecrated monarch. The dynasty's fortunes, the survival of the lineage and its glory are in her hands, as seen by the victory won by the young warrior prince, her son. Young as he is, he has proved himself worthy of being an emperor. He has defended the state and its territories and protected its subjects by pushing the invading foreigners out, rescuing the sacred stallion that they had seized and bringing it safely back to the "sacred enclosure" for the successful performance of the Aśvamedha Yāga. The symbolic significance of this sacrifice ought not to be ignored or understated.

The comparison of Dhāriṇī to Mother Earth is not an idle comparison. She bears, nurtures, sustains. When she gives her consent to the marriage of Mālavikā to her royal husband with much reluctance, it is true, she is not simply following the prescribed conduct of a pativratā one to whom fidelity and loyalty to the husband is a lifelong and dedicated commitment. With her intelligence and knowledge of the world of harsh, political realities, she knows that unseemly squabbling within the royal family would inevitably lead to its ruin. As the future empress who would be the First Lady of a vast empire she has to be worthy of that title. Then, perhaps, she would become the Queen Mother. (The Queen Mother was one of the five important personages in ancient kingdoms in India who were involved in important issues like succession and so on. The other four were the Prime Minister,

the General commanding the armies, the High Priest and the Sūta, the Royal Charioteer).

> "Ah! Such lack of regard for the proprieties (or decorum) in my revered lord", observes Dhāriṇī sadly. (1:20.+)

Agnimitra, intoxicated by overwhelming passion for Mālavikā does not care to observe "the proprieties". Kālidāsa in using this word implies much more than the observance of the common courtesies of everyday life such as rising to welcome a guest and so on but "proprieties" of a more serious nature that contribute to the stability and survival of family, society and state. Agnimitra seems to have little interest in observing protocol either. But the Queen is aware not only of the duties and responsibilities that are part of high position, but also of the "image", of the perceptions that the public has of the dynasty.

When Kauśikī admonishes the Queen following a subtle signal from the king, in the following words:

> Why do you turn your face away from
> His Lordship without cause?
> Wives, it is true have great power over their husbands;
> but they show their anger only with good reason,
> my lady whose face has the loveliness of the moon :

It is quite clear that Kauśikī neither knows nor understands Dhāriṇī, or the way her mind works (1:8). Kauśikī's mind runs in traditional grooves of thought. Dhāriṇī's quick intelligence sees through Kauśikī's manipulation of the situation in the king's favour. She says to herself:

> You foolish woman, do you think I am fast asleep when I am wide awake? (I:18:1,2).

Kauśikī's attempts to provide Agnimitra with full scope to watch and observe Mālavikā's beauty under the pretext of being "the presiding judge in the ensuing contest" are not very subtle. For instance, her instructions to the two dance gurus reveal some lack of taste that is the consequence of her eagerness to have Mālavikā obtain a royal husband.

> See that both the performers enter the stage dressed in costumes that will show to the best advantage the beauty and elegance of all their limbs. (I:20.-)

It should be noted that at this point Dhāriṇī is in a rather weak position. Her young son is on a dangerous mission guarding the sacred stallion roaming all over that vast empire of the Śuṅgas. She has to tread softly and she permits herself only one cutting remark.

> If only my noble lord would bring to bear such resourceful-

> ness in the management of affairs of the state how well it would redound to his credit!

She is a little off the mark here as we know having looked closely at Agnimitra's handling of the Vidarbha problem. But how right she is when she says to herself a little later when she and everyone there sees the king exhibiting his passion for Mālavikā most indecorously. Dhāriṇī speaking to herself comments:

> Ha! How little regard does my noble lord have for the proprieties!

There is a code of decorum tacitly laid down and observed by everyone in that exclusive world of the antaḥpura. Agnimitra has no qualms about breaking this code if it comes in the way of his overwhelming passion for Mālavikā. In Act 3, Gautama has to admonish him that to break his promise to Irāvatī about meeting her for a ride on the swing would not be right. ".... to abandon the observance of these civilities that form the decorum of the antaḥhpura.... is surely conduct unworthy of your Honour". Not to show "dākṣiṇyam", not to be a husband who is *dakṣiṇa* (considerate and attentive to all his wives even if he loves only one of them) is a fault. A dhirodātta nāyaka, be it Agnimitra, Purūrava, or Duḥṣanta is characterized as dhirodātta because he possesses certain noble qualities of which one is *dākṣiṇyam.* (Gallantry might be the closest equivalent in English) . But this quality or virtue which traditional scholars in Sanskrit set great store by is seldom seen in nāyakas in Kalidasa's dramas. The quality is more conspicuous by its absence. The definition of a nāyaka might have come into existence after Kālidāsa or perhaps Kālidāsa might not have wished to create nāyakas who were "perfect" according to some definition.

In every one of Kālidāsa's dramas there are tragic undertones. It is seen most clearly in the last play as we shall observe when we come to it. But they are present in the other two plays as well. In *Mālavikāgnimitram,* Irāvatī is a clear example. But it is in Dhāriṇī's life that we should specifically look for them. Noble and magnanimous lady that she is, she is literally entrapped in the web of intrigue woven by the vidūṣaka, Gautama. Everyone around her, her personal attendant, Bakulāvalikā, the guard of the antaḥpura, Devasenā whom she trusts, Kauśikī who is like a companion to her, even the celebrated physician, Dhruvasiddhi, are all ranged against her. And with her son far away and in constant danger, Dhāriṇī is all alone. A great queen, a future empress, she stands all alone. This situation which can only be described as tragic is seen at its most moving phase in Act 4 in the most heartless trick that the vidūṣaka plays on her to get hold of her signet ring to have Mālavikā and Bakulāvalikā released from their

confinement underground in the treasure chamber. When Gautama goes through his bit of play acting, pretending to be at death's door, Dhāriṇī is grief stricken and she cries out in anguish even before the wily trickster describes the fake encounter with a snake in detail:

Alas, alas! It is I who have become the cause of danger
to the Brahmana's life.

And while she is enduring grief and an unnecessary feeling of guilt at having been an unwitting cause of danger to her husband's friend and companion, Gautama continues to stage step by step the cruel charade that he has planned with such ingenuity, to the point where the queen takes off her signet ring with a serpent chased on it, to save Gautama's life, as she is led to believe. And all this gratuitous cruelty to Dhāriṇī is only for the purpose of gratifying the king's passion for Mālavikā. And the saddest part of all this is that the king, the female guard, Devasenā, and the physician are all in this together with the vidūṣaka. Gautama had visited this kind of cruelty in a milder form earlier on, on Dhāriṇī. He had tampered with the swing and made her fall and hurt her foot badly so that she would be unable to perform the Rite to make the golden asoka bloom. The Queen then had to ask Mālavikā to stand in for her promising that she could have whatever she desired most if the tree bloomed within a stipulated period of time. Both the cruel tricks succeed without the queen entertaining any suspicions because the king himself is party to these deceptions. We are compelled to notice a streak of callousness in all three nāyakas, Agnimitra, Purūrava and Duḥṣhsanta. It is only Duḥṣanta who accepts full responsibility for what he did, repents and becomes a changed man and therefore a better ruler. Perhaps we are not meant to take Gautama's cruel stratagems and the king's part in them seriously. But beyond a point tricks cease to be funny and become problematic

The next play, *Vikramorvaśīyam* is a very different play. It goes far back into mythic time when gods and heroes walked together and were comrades in arms in mythic wars of *devas* and *daitya-danavas,* (or immortals and titans) like the war in *Kumārasambhavam.* The hero Purūrava is a mythic monarch, divinely descended, the grandson of the moon; the heroine is a celestial, Urvaśī, one of the principal dancers of Indra's court in svarga. The action is however placed in the mortal world, in the royal palace and pleasure gardens of the king. Again there are problems. The course of true love does not run smoothly but it is much easier than in the previous play. But the most significant difference of this play from the other two is in its structure. The fourth act is unique to this play in all Sanskrit drama, for it is a blend of dance, music and speech with only one character on stage, the king himself, mad as a hatter, having lost his loved Urvaśī who suddenly

vanished in the grove they had entered to engage in love-sport. Act 4 performs an important role in the structure and vision of the play, exploring the nature of passionate obsession leading the lover to the very verge of madness; exploring states of consciousness that are paranormal. The dramatist explores such states of consciousness but somewhat differently in his last play *Abhijñānaśākuntalam.*

Kālidāsa, as he would have been familiar with the many versions of the Urvaśī-Purūrava story/legend/myth has composed his play having internalised the material of the many sources that he had at hand. The oldest source extant is the Ṛgveda (10:95) where the story is cast in the form of a dialogue. It is quite possible that it was performed as part of the rituals of sacrifice, or performed on some occasion other than a sacrifice to a congregation assembled to celebrate some event, or a festival of some sort, it is difficult to say. It might have been staged as a dramatic performance, religious or quasi-religious. The original Vedic Sūkta is somewhat cryptic. The story has more than one dimension: a myth of a natural phenomenon (in ṚV 10:95:2 Urvaśī speaks of herself as "uṣasām agriyeva"—the first or foremost light of dawn); a metaphor, accompanying some ritual related to the creation of the sacred fire; a puranic story/legend combining mythic with popular or folk story elements. B.R. Yadava has dealt with the Urvaśī material in his *Evolution of Urvaśī*[h]. Readers interested can consult his book. I *read* Urvaśī as the first ray of light at daybreak, symbolic of that moment in the Beginning when Darkness was broken by Light. In the Nāsadīya Sūkta (RV 10:125) we read that *The One* sprang up mightily from the dark Waters of Creation (*tama āsīt tamasā gūdham....yad āsīt tapasas tat mahinā ajāyata ekam*[j]).

Taking a few details from many sources Kālidāsa has created an exquisite lyrical drama. Further, he has used it to convey his own, unique vision of human emotions and existential problems. The play itself cannot be placed in the category of nāṭaka. The word troṭaka is sometimes used to distinguish it from a nāṭaka. The term *melo-drama* in the sense of a musical dramatic creation might be suggested as a possible term to define it, if definition and pigeonholing this work is deemed important. I use the term "melo-drama" advisedly. The term is not being used in the commonly understood sense of any writing that has suspense, sensational episodes and so on. It is used here to define a drama that makes use of music and dance, the first part of the word, namely, melo being derived from the Greek "*melos*" meaning music, song, melody.

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h. *Evolution of Urvaśī*, B.R. Yadava; Vijnana Prakasana, Aligarh.
j. Translation of the quotation is as follows: "Darkness was covered by Darkness...what lay concealed, *That One*, rose mightily out of fiery heat (or blazing consciousness)".

Act 4 of *Vikramorvaśīyam* is quite unique in Sanskrit drama. Music is used by Kālidāsa in all his three plays to set the tone and mood, as for instance, the lyric sung by the Naṭī (actress) in the prologue of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* (1.3) which transports the audience into another world, the "play-world" of the green woods whose "guardian deity" is Śakuntalā. Again Kālidāsa uses music in Act 5 (1) which serves several functions. It provides a premónition of what is to come, the abandonment of Śakuntalā (paralleling the previous abandonment of the singer of this song, Queen Hamsavatī); it points out to the agitation of mind and heart that possesses Duḥṣanta (2); it also finds echoes in Act 6 where the king full of remorse attempts to re-live and re-experience his initial meeting with Śakuntalā in Act 1. (6.18-22). However, in *Vikramorvaśīyam* music becomes a dominant mode of expression. In Act 4 it replaces verbal expression though not completely. That is not possible in a drama. It should be noted that in Act 4, there is no dramatic action. There is no narrative and no dialogue either. What we have is a long, almost continuous monologue spoken by the king and interspersed with song and dance. It would be more appropriate to say that the monologue is done to the accompaniment of song and dance. It is a "form" that we are familiar with in the classical dance forms in our own time, where the dancer dances to the accompaniment of music, both singing and instrumental music performed nowadays on one side of the stage, formerly in the back stage, Raṅgaśirṣa. The king and perhaps other characters dancing as well, delineating deer and peacock, koel and wild goose, the Tree of Paradise, ocean and river, occupy the front part of the stage (Raṅgapīṭha). This kind of writing and presentation by the dramatist provides a balletic quality to Act 4. Music is employed to explore and express emotional states. Words are simple except in a few verses (7, 10, 14, 22, 52, 54, 57) where the rich imagery full of resonances that is characteristic of the great poet appears. The stanzas are in Sanskrit, the other lyrics sung by a singer seated with the musicians at the back part of the stage are in Prakrit. They are not sung or recited behind the curtain in the *nepathya* or greenroom. As a rule these lyrics externalize the intense sorrow of Purūrava and those moments of hope that lighten that sorrow from time to time. The outer landscape of the forest and groves of Gandhamādana complements the inner landscape of the king's emotions : grief, hope, disappointment, despair. It shapes these emotions as well as the king wanders desolate and disorientated in a state of consciousness wavering between objects real and fancied. Purūrava sees Urvaśī everywhere. He sees her in the real objects before his eyes, unable to differentiate them from the beloved whom he fancies has been metamorphosed into each of these several objects. But he draws back in

time to make the necessary distinction between "the real" and "the imagined".

The nāyaka in this lyrical drama, Purūrava, is totally different from the protagonists of the other two plays. Purūrava is not particularly interested it seems, in earthly glory, in governing an empire. Without hesitation he leaves the cares of ruling the kingdom to his ministers and leaves with Urvaśī for the earthly paradise of the Gandhamādana groves to enjoy the fullness of pleasure with her. He finds "servitude" to Urvaśī most desirable.

"She is indeed the pinnacle of good fortune for me", he exclaims in ecstasy holding Urvaśī in his arms (3: 19. –1).

> Not the sole, undisputed possession
> of the royal, white umbrella, the symbol
> of supreme sovereignty over the whole Earth;
> not the edicts of mine graven on stones
> illuminated by the light flashing from jewelled diadems
> of great princes, my vassals, kneeling,
> have I felt so blessed as on this day
> I kneel at Urvaśī's feet, appointed
> in endearing service to do her will, my friend.

At the end of the play, again without hesitation he orders preparations for the coronation of their son Āyus as he readies himself to leave the world and live in the forests, not caring to live in the world without Urvaśī.

An important consideration at this point is to ask ourselves this question. Would Kālidāsa create a nāyaka like this? A warrior, veteran of many bitter wars against the Dānavas as Indra's friend, to abandon everything: duty, responsibility, the tasks of governing an empire and protecting the subjects, royal glory, sovereignty over the wide earth, pomp and pleasure and privilege, for just a woman? Unless *that* woman symbolized not mere sexual enjoyment, but something more, something far beyond earthly enjoyments. I venture to suggest that Urvaśī symbolizes an *ideal* which draws Purūrava out of and beyond this mundane would, and what it has to offer. I would further suggest that the ideal is *the* ideal of Beauty. Urvaśī is Purūrava's ideal of what is eternal and inaccessible; she is the first ray of light that breaks the darkness and silence that reigned in the universe before *anything was*. And by this I do not mean mokṣa in the accepted sense, nor nirvāṇa. My reading is not advaitic. It is poetic.

> But alas! O cruel one! I see not
> your whole likeness anywhere in any one thing (*Megh*:103).

It is the poet's passionate cry, even an anguished cry that Beauty as a whole is denied to him even as a likeness, an image, a reflection. There are barriers

that confront human vision, and limit the imagination. The yakṣa in the poem, *Meghadūtam*, yearns for a *likeness* of the Whole of Beauty that he sees only in fragments. *Meghadūtam* is one of the poet's last two works written in his final years when his vision had mellowed. Purūrava on the other hand yearns not for an image, a reflection, but for the *thing itself*, for Beauty (not a beautiful woman). *Vikramorvaśīyam* is a play of Kālidāsa's youth; exuberant, given to ecstasies, longing for the impossible. Purūrava is an unusual nāyaka. Act 4 is a lyrical outpouring of this yearning. The king sees her, Beauty, everywhere, but like the yakṣa (*Megh.* 103), only in fragments. And not completely. He cannot cross the barriers that are intrinsic to the human condition. Purūrava sings, he dances, he converses with every object in Nature that owns a share of the loveliness of Beauty as a whole, as it exists in the human imagination, but exists only as an idea, as an intellectual construct. The quest for an ideal for the *whole* is a never-ending quest. At some point, the play has to end; the dramatist has to cut short this never-ending quest. The only alternative would be Death, extinction, the death of Purūrava even as he holds the Saṅgamaṇīya in his hand and embraces the vine. In the play the vine is his Urvaśī, but it is a fictive Urvaśī who lives and moves only in the world of the play. But the death of the nāyaka? Is it possible to contemplate such a final and extreme conclusion in a play? Or in any work of art? Can we think of it as an acceptable option? Could Kālidāsa have seriously considered this as a proper ending for his play? Kālidāsa cannot take that step. Were he living now and composing drama and poetry he could. He probably would. In the logic of poetry that last, final step would be appropriate. It would be *right*. But not during the times he lived and wrote in.

We now proceed to an exploration of some of the aspects and problems of the most important play of Kālidāsa, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*. The play *Śakuntalā* is a beautiful blend of romance and fairy tale with elements of comedy. In the last sections of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* that are devoted wholly to a description of the rituals of the Horse-Sacrifice (Aśvamedha Yajña) where the names of some of the kings who performed them are mentioned, we come across this line. "In Nāḍapit, the Apsarā Śakuntalā conceived (bore) Bharata". This is the earliest literary reference to Śakuntalā and her son (the little boy Sarva-damana in the play) who performed many horse-sacrifices on the banks of the river Yamunā after he had conquered the world, fulfilling the prophecy of the mystic personage, Mārīca, (7:33). Nāḍapit is glossed by the commentator[47] as Kaṇva's hermitage. But that identification has obviously been made on the basis of the Śakuntalā-Duḥṣanta story in the *Mahābhārata*, where however, the name Nāḍapit does not occur. The original story of Śakuntala referred to in the SB is lost to us; we have

only a very long and earthy version of it in the epic (*Mbh.*: 1: 62-69). It must be our guess then, that Nāḍapit was some place of enchantment, a pool of apsarās perhaps, where strange things could happen and mortals meet and fall in love with celestial nymphs.

With the very first lines of the play we are transported to a world of enchantment. A handsome, young king, out hunting, is lured far out into another world; and the inevitable happens. The song of the actress (*naṭī*) has already lured the waiting audience into this world. Music is used skilfully to make this transition. A point to note here is that the word used for the fleet deer that has drawn King Duḥṣhsanta far away is *sāraṇga*, which is also the name of a raga or musical mode. The raga, *sāraṅga*, is defined as one that through the attractive arrangement of notes, *colours* the mind of the hearer (*Raṅga* signifies colour, paint and also the stage.) Music projects the appropriate mood.

The play is located in the mythic past in a world where mortals still moved with gods; the human and divine intermingled. In this world, the gods were not distant but friends of heroes like Duḥṣanta who participated with them to keep order in the universe. By removing the action of the play into the world of the past, distant in time, a poetic and dramatic purpose is served; it inhibits a realistic approach to the play. It clearly marks the line that separates the fictive world of the play from our every day world. In the Sanskrit text the two words *Atha*, (now) and *Iti*, (thus) at the beginning and end of a play enclose the play-world. Literally, it would read as follows: now begins the play, entitled *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*; thus ends the play, etc.

The play-world thus created contains another world — the world of the deep and dark forests near the river Mālinī; the green world into which we are lured by the deer and where we meet Śakuntalā, Child of Nature, who as noted earlier on is also envisaged as the guardian deity of the woodland.

As already noted, apsarās (born of *The Waters*, i.e., the creative waters where life originated) are powers of Nature, associated with fertility and plenitude as yakṣa -yakṣīs are. In the ancient myth of the Churning of the Ocean by gods and anti-gods to obtain ambrosia, the elixir of immortality, the apsarās rose out of the waters together with many other wondrous things including Beauty (*Śrī*) herself (see under Myths, Appendix II).

In the Vedic myth referred to, Śakuntalā is an apsarā and the daughter of an apsarā in the epic tale which is the immediate source of the play. This is an aspect of her origin that is important to keep in mind, because in the play she is seen as the Lady of Nature, one who lives in the 'green world' into whom has flowed the 'beauty born of murmuring sound'. She possesses

the beauty of nature as well as its holiness. In her 'nature' and 'nurture' blend without being in opposition to each other, for her 'green world' is also an *āśrama*, a hermitage, a *tapo-vana*, or penance-grove where tranquillity prevails ordered by discipline. She is an ornament of the Hermitage (an image out of the gilded world of the royal court), as well as a creature of the woodlands; both phrases are the king's. Not only are a number of flower-images other than the conventional ones of the lotus-petalled eyes and slender vine-like arms used to describe her; she is also seen as a flower, the jasmine. She and the jasmine are constantly brought together (like the beloved in *Meghadūtam*); they are sisters, born of the same mother, Nature. Can this flower, this sensitive plant, survive in the other world, the glittering, gilded world of the Paurava monarch? It cannot, it seems. Śakuntalā herself poses this question. "Rent from my dear father's lap like the sapling of the sandal tree uprooted from the side of the Malaya mountain, how can I survive ever in an alien soil!" (4.22.-2,3). This image of the sandal tree will recur in a later, very significant context in Act 7, to which we shall refer presently. Act 5 is clear proof that she is trampled on, stripped and mutilated (figuratively) and is at the point of death when she is rapt from the astonished gaze of the beholders by a shaft of light (5.33b). In this connection it is very important to note two facts made clear in the play. Firstly, Śakuntalā is never seen as actually living in the gilded world of the court and being a part of it. The fact is only talked about in various ways by different people at different times; but it is not part of the play. She is never brought into direct contact with the Queen, or the Queen Mother or any of the ladies of Duḥṣanta's palace, as the heroine of *Vikramorvaśīyam*, also an apsarā, is. Śakuntalā is a heroine different from the others: Mālavikā and Urvaśī, the noble Dhāriṇī and Auśīnarī, Sudaksinā and Indumatī. She is special, in a class by herself with the "beloved" (the yakṣī) of the poem, *Meghadūtam*.

Secondly, the benediction is not spoken in this play in the world of the Court, in the king's world. It is spoken in a world beyond this which is the *perfected* world of the Primal Parents, Mārīca and Aditi. There is talk certainly of a return to this world. But the play comes to its end in Mārīca's Hermitage on Hema-Kūta (Kailāsa) which mortals cannot reach. "But mortals cannot come to these regions on their own, noble lady". (7.20.+ 1). Before the king can enter this world he has to be purified. First he proves his worth by battling the forces of darkness and disorder that threaten the order of the universe. For this he has to be roused from the state of utter despondency into which he had fallen weighed down by an overwhelming sense of guilt. He had become disoriented, nerveless and swooned away (6:28). It is significant that it is deep concern for someone close to him, Māḍhavya,

that pulls him out of this depression, lacking the will to live. Duḥṣanta's path to Mārīca's Hermitage and the finding of what has been lost is essentially similar to that of the yakṣa's in the poem, though they are framed differently because of the differences in the two literary modes, drama and lyric. But the images of sanctity and purification are repeated in both the poem and the play: Viṣṇu's triple-stride, Ganga's celestial stream, the sacred pool of golden lotuses.

The whole of Act 7 is placed in the world of Mārīca's Hermitage where the highest penances are wrought in the penance groves of the Perfected Seers; it is a world which ascetics perform the severest austerities to attain. Here Mārīca (The Luminous) born of the Self-Existent Light, himself performs penance with his consort, Aditi. The last stage direction that brings the play to a close is: *Exit All.* No distinction is made between the characters belonging to the Hermitage and the mortals who have to descend to Duḥṣanta's capital.

In *Vikramorvaśīyam* whose theme is also the marriage of a mortal, King Purūrava, descended from the moon, to a celestial nymph, their parting and re-union, the benediction is spoken on earth, at the King's Court after Nārada who comes down to earth with a message of goodwill from Indra consecrates Prince Āyus (from whom Duḥṣanta is directly descended) as the heir apparent.

Another significant point to note in the last stanza of *Śakuntalā*, the benediction is the tone and quality of the final words of the poet and dramatist:

> May the Self-Existent Lord who unites in Himself
> the Dark and the Light;
> Whose Infinite Power pervades the Universe,
> annihilate forever the round of my births.
> (7 : 35)

Nīla-lohita is the epithet used for Śiva; *nīla*, suggesting the dark-blue of the poison the Lord swallowed at the Beginning to save the newly created world, and *lohita* (*rohita* is a variant), the brightness of Gaurī or Śakti. The diads and triads in Indian thought are richly multivalent and their meanings and symbolism can be endlessly explored and defined: day-night; light-dark; beauty-power, end-endless, and so on. The tendency of the human mind is to see the world as constituted of categories of polarities; the bent of the Indian mind leads it to see these as *balanced*, and to attempt to reconcile them in a *one-ness* in which opposites are perceived as aspects of one and the same. The duality is reconciled in the Trinity, as in the classic *Trimūrti*, the three-aspected image of Śiva at Elephanta near Bombay. Mārīca is

described as the offspring of the Self-Existent Energy (7:27); this should be read in juxtaposition with the benediction.

There is one further point to consider in relation to the benediction. *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* is Kālidāsa's last work and the words spoken last are therefore eminently fitting as the final utterance of the great poet and dramatist. It is his farewell to his work and to the world in an ultimate sense. Kālidāsa has arrived at that point in his life and career where every third thought is of the other shore. But the words have a deeper poetic significance in the dramatic structure of the play. The two worlds of the play, the 'green world' of the woods and the gilded world of the Royal Court, are too far apart (as we shall see presently), and the reconciliation, re-union and restoration cannot be celebrated in either of them. Whereas the two worlds in the poem, *Meghadūtam*, are continuous and even interfused, there is a sharp break made in the play between the two worlds at the close of Act 4. Therefore, that moment of epiphany of reconciliation and reunion has to happen elsewhere, in another world which I shall call the 'golden world', the world of the Imagination, a phrase suggested by the word *Hema-Kūta* (Golden Peak) (7.8. + 6-8), which is a mystic region that the Purāṇas place beyond the Himalayas, in the vicinity of the mythical mountain, Meru or Sumeru. It is not the initial world of enchantment we stepped into, the 'green world' of the deep and dark forests. It is, as we saw earlier, a place coveted by ascetics who perform the severest penance to gain; the place where the highest forms of penances are wrought in the penance groves of the Perfected Seers; a place filled by the luminous presence of the Primal Parents of the universe. Here, the

> common bird or petal
> And all complexities of mire ....

are miraculously transformed into the glory of changeless metal, into the artifice of eternity.

The difference in tone and character of the two worlds, the initial green world and this golden world which is the artifice of eternity, is seen clearly in the kind of imagery that shapes them. (The two worlds of Acts 1 and 7 reflect each other in many respects, as we shall see.) The world of Act 1 is the world of nature, with flowers blooming, honeybees hovering over them, of green foliage and tender young shoots and buds being prised open, of clear waters flowing in channels to lave the roots of trees and the fresh cool spray of Mālinī's snow-fed waters wafted by the breeze. The colour-words present in the descriptions are those of the fresh colours of the woodlands and of budding youth. In Act 7, on the other hand, the colour-words are drawn mostly from a world of gold and gems and jewels (but of an elemental

world, and not words describing the glitter of the Royal Court): the golden sheen of the waters, the glitter of rain drops, the gleam of the flickering lightning and the liquid gold of the mountain itself reflecting the red and gold of sunsets. Here, the lotuses are golden as in Alakā; the places of meditation are not green meadows where deer roam or the roots of trees under the green shade of leafy trees, but jewelled caves with celestial nymphs, gorgeously dressed and jewelled and seductive, walking about. It is a world of austere beauty, luminous with the light of the spirit; it is not a world of Nature, spontaneous, informed by instinct, but of nature perfected by restraint and discipline. In the last act, time past, present and future are brought together in Mārīca's blessings, to be contained within the golden round of Time; the word in the text, *yuga-śata-parivartanaih* is literally, 'the revolutions of hundreds of epochs—aeons' (7:34).

Certain prophecies are made in this golden world about the future, after Duḥṣanta's time. The interest in this act is focussed on the little prince, Bharata (Bearer of the Earth) who is to inherit the future. Mārīca's prophecies (7.33;33.- 1) echo the incorporeal voice of the Mystic Fire that has already spoken (4:4). The little boy, flanked by two hermit women is the centre of the last act, as Śakuntalā, his mother accompanied by her two friends, is of the first. The two acts reflect each other in many respects. The scene where the king after dismounting from the chariot is about to enter the grove of Mārīca's Hermitage and has his first glimpse of his son is a replica of the scene in Act I where also the king, dismounting from his chariot at the fringes of the grove of Kaṇva's Hermitage, enters and sees the boy's mother for the first time. The finding of the lost son and heir precedes and leads to the *re-cognition* of the mother. An interesting parallel is provided in the last scene of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale.*

Words are keys to open doors for the imagination on its journey of exploration into the fictive world. The title—*Abhijñānaśākuntalam* underlines the central issue in the play. Śakuntalā is recognized by virtue of a token of love, not by love itself. In the absence of concrete, tangible proof of love, and marriage, she is lost; she is nothing. Again, there is an interesting parallel with Shakespeare. In *Othello,* proof of the heroine's chastity and love is demanded. Desdemona's chastity hangs on a handkerchief, Śakuntalā's on a ring. Both heroines are blissfully unaware of the importance of the token. To them love is its own proof and a witness to their chastity. It is in Acts 5 and 6 that Kālidāsa probes most deeply into the heart of his society's accepted norms and values. He makes Miśrakeśī ask a highly significant question (6.13. + I 0, 11): " ..... does a love like this need a token of recognition? How can this be?" The probing is accompanied by another equally significant question, the question of *knowing* which is related

to the recognition of Śakuntalā at the close of the play. How does one *know?* Is "the truest inner prompting", its own "unassailable authority", to the noble and virtuous? This is the way of knowing that the king claims for himself but the claim is subjected to ironic scrutiny and found to be not well-founded.

What is *knowing?* The king at first knew Śakuntalā carnally, as an object; and frankly as an object of pleasure. She is a flower to smell, a gem to hold and an ornament to wear. She is hardly a person to him. It is only at the close of the play that he sees her as a person and *knows* her truly. Something has to be added to his view of her to make him see her as a person of intrinsic beauty and not merely a beautiful object. In *Meghadūtam* the idea of outward lustre being the *semblance* of inner glow (of powers) is introduced in the opening stanza. Priyaṁvadā (4: 9-10) is able to correlate outer beauty with the inner. But Duḥṣanta seems to be unable to do this until the long separation and grief at losing Śakuntalā and his son and an intense sense of guilt, give him eyes to see deeply. When she stands before him, pale with suffering, the flesh mortified to let the spirit glow forth, the king truly sees her and knows her. "Aha! Here is the Lady Śakuntalā...... it is *she.....*

Dressed in dusky garments,
her face fined thin ...."
(7:21)

It almost appears as if her exquisite beauty had been a barrier to his understanding of her. All he saw then was the glow of passion and youth and beauty which he described in images of blooming flowers and tender shoots. Initially, Duḥṣanta had known Śakuntalā only carnally; she was an object of pleasure to be enjoyed. The imagery of Acts 1 and 3 convey this quite clearly. He is the bee circling at day break over the "jasmine's cup". Even while he is setting himself up as the noble and self-restrained man shying away from the touch of another man's wife, his appreciative eye, the trained eye of a connoisseur of feminine beauty sees the sweetness beneath the enveloping veil "barely-revealed", as she stands "like a bud not burst into bloom ... / a tender sprout among yellowing leaves". The play examines accepted ideals and the relation of what *seems*, to what *is*, of semblance to truth, through the comments of Māḍhavya and by means of ironies built into the structure and language of the play. A fine example of the ironies that convey a critical point of view is in Act 1. Duḥṣanta is passing himself off as the Paurava monarch's Minister for Religious Affairs visiting the penance-groves that are specified as Groves of Righteousness (*Dharma-Araṇya*), to see that they are free of impediments to the performances of all sacred rites. Yet, by ceaselessly hunting and creating terror and confusion in the woods, he is responsible for the wild tusker, crazed with fear, charging

into the sacred grove like the "very embodiment of hindrance to penance". Recklessly charging towards Kaṇva's Hermitage chasing a blackbuck, he stops short of killing the sacred animal only when an anchorite stands barring his way. Again, there is unconscious irony in Duḥṣanta's words, when he admonishes the little boy teasing a lion cub in Mārīca's Hermitage and describes him as "the young of a black serpent which spoils / for other creatures the pleasant sanctuary / that is the fragrant sandal tree" (7.18). In this image, Duḥṣanta is the black serpent which initially trespassed into the sanctuary (Kaṇva's Hermitage); the sandal tree should be linked with Śakuntalā's description of herself as the sapling of the sandal, rent from the side of the Malaya mountain – its sanctuary (4.21.+8-10). When this image is seen in the context of the trial-scene in Act 5 and placed beside the images the king uses to characterize Śakuntalā's conduct — the turbulent river sullying its own crystal stream and uprooting the trees growing on its banks, the cuckoo stealthily creeping into another's nest leaving its offspring there,.the irony is devastating.

The whole of Act 5 is disturbing, full of ironies; questioning is implicit in its tone from beginning to end. The question of truth-speaking and dissimulation is raised. Wearing the mantle of virtue while practising deception is characterized as the art that princes are taught. A reference to manuals on statecraft such as Kautilya's *Arthásāstra* may be seen here. But Kālidāsa alerts the reader to another view. A king who gains or inherits sovereignty has to keep it, guard it presumably, by whatever means are deemed necessary. What then is the ideal of kingship? More important, what does the word *rāja-ṛṣi*, royal sage, mean? How is a king a sage? Is the word a mere praise-word, as the young hermit says in unconscious irony? A public image as different from or opposed to a private image? The play raises many questions but by no means in a strident manner. Further, Kālidāsa does not leave us without an idea of what a royal sage should be. In the verses spoken by the two young hermits who see the king for the first time, we have a sketch of a monarch who is a great warrior and a good ruler, a complete king or royal sage (2.15). Dilīpa, the founder of the illustrious solar dynasty in Kālidāsa's epic, *Raghuvaṁśam*, is this ideal monarch, a royal sage. But is Duḥṣanta one? Verse 15 is interesting on account of its use of certain words in their double meanings: *āśrama*[48] is a hermitage and also one of the four stages in a man's life; *yoga* is contemplation, but it also means through, or by means of; *vaśin* is one who has his senses (passions) under perfect control and a king who has his subjects under perfect control, that is to say, the kingdom is well-ruled. Each of the two meanings refers to one of the two parts of the compound word, *rāja-ṛṣi; raja* (ruler) and *ṛṣi* (sage). It strikes us as something of an

etymological exercise, true to the letter; the young hermit who is also a student is displaying his knowledge. I leave it to the reader to judge whether it is true to the spirit.

The play subjects not only the ideal of kingship but also the character of Duḥṣanta as king and man to an ironic scrutiny. In the process, Duḥṣanta's personality is seen as far more complex and interesting than it would be if we were to perceive him as the ideal hero (*dhirodātta nāyaka*) of the ancient texts on drama, and as a *rāja-ṛṣi*. He is presented as the great king he undoubtedly was in the popular imagination fed on story and legend. His personal appearance is described in images that convey majesty and strength as well as uncommon beauty and grace of manner. His frame is likened to that of a magnificent tusker roaming the mountains and as being spare and instinct with energy; his beauty of face and form dazzle like a priceless gem cut and polished by the exquisite art of a master craftsman. Even the rather cantankerous Śārṅgarava grudgingly admits that the kingdom is well-ruled. A number of images glorify him as a godlike hero; the very first image compares him to Śiva himself. But we have to keep in mind that the *sūta* (charioteer) who makes this comparison is also a bard and bards are given to praising highly the monarch they serve. However, an ironic point of view is adopted to show this great king as more human and fallible and less godlike and ideal. A 'public image' of Duḥṣanta is built-up by the praise-words of hermits and bards alike; the latter are the public relations officers in the bureaucracies of the past. But, there is the 'private image' of the king too, the face other than the royal face that we see from our privileged position as readers and audience. We see this when the king is in the company of his friend and close companion, Māḍhavya, who is probably a childhood companion of Duḥṣanta's judging from his words in Act 2: "Māḍhavya, my friend, you have always been accepted as a son by our mother". It is also sharply revealed in the many asides given to the king in the play, mostly in Acts 1 and 3, as he watches Śakuntalā from where he is concealed behind bushes and thickets of vines. The two together, the 'asides' and the familiar and relaxed conversation with Māḍhavya complete the characterization which cannot be accomplished in all its fullness by the ceremonious verse alone used to project the royal and public image. Often the two faces are dialoguing, commenting on each other through carefully arranged juxtapositions as in Act 2.

Another device used to project the two images of the king is symbolic gesture. Act 1 furnishes a striking example of how symbolic gesture is manipulated to achieve several ends. On entering the sage Kaṇva's penance-groves, after some distance, Duḥṣanta dismounts, takes off the regalia, his crown and jewels and hands them over with his bow and arrows to the

charioteer. This gesture (and I suspect that on the stage it would have been done deliberately and elaborately like a ritual by the actor), is symbolic in two ways: it represents the reverence the king feels in the sacred grove and all that it stands for and for the great sage who presides over it; it also signifies the act of 'putting off' of the royal image. The public image of a king is a 'mask' which he puts on like an actor putting on theatrical make-up and the costume to suit the role he is about to play. It goes with the regalia and the pomp and panoply which serve to impress and dazzle the world and through these to control it. Duḥṣanta now enters the Hermitage simply dressed, like an ordinary person, a visitor. Further, in putting off his royal face, Duḥṣanta is released from certain expectations and inhibitions on the part of others as well as his own. He enters another world, far removed from the court and its pressures in more senses than one – Śakuntalā's world. Śakuntalā does not see him in his awesome majesty and splendour. She and her friends see Duḥṣanta simply as a noble from the court, an officer of the king which is how he introduces himself. And we too begin to see him, not as the great monarch bearing the heavy burden of his dynasty's fame and surrounded by the aura of Puru's idealism and exemplary conduct, but as just a young and handsome courtier, well-spoken, with an eye for pretty girls. The effect of the 'unmasking' is to put Śakuntalā's friends at ease; a lively conversation ensues. However, this too is a mask, for Duḥṣanta is the king only pretending that he is not the king. Priyamvadā and Anasūya soon see through his threadbare disguise and the mask is quietly dropped, though the girls play along and keep up the pretence. But the action has already been initiated; Śakuntalā has fallen deeply in love and the plot must now move under its own impetus.

A good deal of good-humoured irony is also pointed at the ascetics in the Hermitage; those hermits rich in holiness, who have blazing energy hidden deep within like sun-crystals that can suddenly kindle into flames if provoked, are in fact as tame as the deer they love and care for. It is an outsider, Durvāsā, who blazes into a furious passion at being disregarded, and the object of his fury is a guileless and innocent young girl. The ideal of asceticism is being questioned here and a contrast drawn a few lines later between Durvāsā, self-important and arrogant, and Kaṇva. The patriarch Kaṇva is the ideal of a sage put forward, self-restrained and noble, gentle and warm and understanding.

Ascetic claims are also subjected to ironic scrutiny in Act 5. Kaṇva's disciples do not come off very well. Śārṅgarava is an angry man, arrogant and tactless; we can see him develop into a Durvāsā in time. We are surprised to see that he does not convey the message of Kaṇva (his guru) to the king in the sage's own words. Śāradvata is a cold, harsh and uncharitable ascetic,

somewhat obsessed by the idea of cleanliness. Neither seems to exemplify the popular idea of ascetics and of ascetic ideals. In contrast, the high priest for whom Śārṅgarava and Śāradvata show some contempt is the only one in the trial-scene who makes a kind and humane gesture towards the suffering Śakuntalā. And it is he who sees the miracle—Śakuntalā transported to another world.

Foreshadowing as a device is used a great deal in the play and skilfully. Śakuntalā's adverse fate is mentioned right at the beginning. (The sign given to Kaṇva at the cave of fire at Prabhāsa strikes one, however, as being cryptic.) Hints of future events are strewn around in the conversation of Śakuntalā and her friends. But the most important examples are in Act 5. The theme of failing memory "wakeful one moment / shrouded in darkness the next" and the "dying flame" in the chamberlain's speech have subtle overtones. Then comes the song of betrayed love, sung in the background and we see the strange effect it has on Duḥṣanta. Music makes a portent more ominous.

> O, you honey-pilfering bee!
> Greedy as ever for fresh honey,
> once, you lovingly kissed
> the mango's fresh spray of flowers—
> and forgotten her—so quickly—?

This little scene takes us back to the beginning of the play, to the first little scene where Duḥṣanta stands concealed behind the trees envying the bee that is hovering round Śakuntalā's face. The same word *madhu-kara*, is used for the bee and used quite consciously. Sanskrit is a language rich in synonyms and the different roots from which the words are formed account for subtle nuances in meaning. The question that comes to mind is this. What is in store for Śakuntalā? We do not know that the Ring has been lost. And Kālidāsa's audience would not have known it either, because the Ring and the Curse are not part of the Śakuntalā-Duḥṣanta story in the epic that the audience would have been familiar with. We already know about the King's many amorous adventures and his proneness to philandering from his conversation with Māḍhavya in Act 2:

> King: Until you see her, you will continue
> to hold forth like this.
> Māḍhavya: If that is so, she must indeed be a miracle of beauty..........to arouse such breathless admiration in *you*.

Māḍhavya's remark immediately before this exchange of comments about the king's jaded appetite seeking fresh interests is reinforced by the second line of Hamsavatī's song. What is different, however, is the streak of callousness underlying the king's comment on the song—"Yes, I once loved

her deeply . . . ." It is a callousness that turns into cruelty in the trial-scene that follows immediately. Śakuntalā, a young girl—*bālā*, the word by which the king refers to her, is a girl of sixteen—out of the sheltered hermitage where she has grown up as her father's 'life-breath' for the very first time when she stands trial in the enclosure surrounding the royal Fire Sanctuary. The king's words are barbed with venom and unworthy of a great king who is the protector of the sacred groves in his realm. An example of the insults Duḥṣanta flings at her is the comparison with the cuckoo that flies away, *abandoning* its offspring in the care of another bird. The reference is not only to her mother, Menakā, one of the apsarās (*who fly in the air*) who abandoned her child Śakuntalā, but to Śakuntalā herself who according to him is trying to pass off her offspring as his child. When Duḥṣanta first met Śakuntalā, he found the strange circumstances of her birth an added attraction; she was the "lightning's splendour" not of this earth. But that was in another world; it was Śakuntalā's, not his. In the world of the Court which she had characterized as alien soil, on which like the sapling of the sandal tree rent from the parent mountain she would not survive, Śakuntalā is unimaginably humiliated. Stripped of dignity and modesty, unveiled in public, an outrage in that society (as it is still in some societies), every word she speaks is twisted into a lie. Finally, she stands alone, abandoned by all. Such isolation is of the essence of a tragic situation in life. The play is poised on the edge of tragedy from which it must now be retrieved.

A point that should be noted is that Śakuntalā is on trial in a very special place. It is not the king's hall of justice, where in other circumstances, the fisherman might have stood trial for having a valuable ring, the royal signet ring, in his possession. It is "the raised enclosure of the Mystic Fire", *Agni*, which witnesses men's deeds and words. The king himself has selected it as the proper place to receive ascetics. The Mystic Fire had already announced Śakuntalā's marriage to Duḥṣanta to Kaṇva and prophecied the greatness of the son to be born of this union. The marriage is therefore a sanctified one.

Kaṇva is a revered sage, a *kulapati*, or head of a community of ascetics and the king has expressed his profound veneration for the sage in whom holy power (Brahma) is vested as a result of his immense penance. His people would have shared this view. Yet, his regard for the sage carries little weight in Duḥṣanta's assessment of the situation at this juncture. It has no influence on his manner and conduct or the way he judges the sage's daughter. This might partly be the consequence of the manner in which the two disciples, especially Śārṅgarava, handle the situation. By putting the marriage of Śakuntalā to the king on a quasi-legal instead of a sanctified basis, as one would expect an ascetic to do, and by introducing public

opinion as a factor into the situation, Śārṅgarava foregrounds the question of *proof* in the mind of someone responding defensively as the king does. Doubts about the legality of the marriage and the legitimacy of the unborn child would inevitably surface in the minds of the ministers, the Court and the people. And these doubts have necessarily to form part of the king's reasoning as he faces an unexpected and difficult problem. (In the epic story, Duḥṣanta clearly states these doubts as the reason for his repudiating Śakuntalā in the Hall of Assembly). He poses a question to Śārṅgarava to which a clear answer cannot be given. The alternatives are, as Duḥṣanta puts it, the desertion of a legally wed wife or adultery (or what seems to him to be adultery). Which is the lesser evil, he asks, since both are forbidden by the law and regarded as heinous sins. Śārṅgarava has no answer. It is a problem which the audience might have pondered over. Insensibly, the sanctuary of the Mystic Fire (*Agni-śaraṇa),* has been transformed into a court of law. Śakuntalā stands no chance of winning her case because she cannot produce the only concrete evidence of a secretly contracted marriage, the royal signet ring given to her by Duḥṣanta. She is lost. In the last moments of her hour of sorrow and tribulation, when she flings her arms up to the indifferent skies and invites death as her last resort, a flash of light appears and carries her away. Śakuntalā vanishes, never to be seen again in *this* world. The reconciliation and reunion of Śakuntalā and Duḥṣanta takes place in another world, 'the golden world' of the Primal Pair. The resolution of the plot is effected in this mythical world. Therefore, one way of reading the play is to see it as having a fictive ending. By introducing the device of a *deus ex machina,* the situation is saved, temporarily; the tragedy is averted, but the tragic tone remains.

The story of Śakuntalā and Duḥṣanta in the *Mahābhārata* (recounted briefly in Appendix III) is the main source for the play. In it, Śakuntalā is portrayed as a fiery and spirited girl who fights tenaciously for her son's rights. She literally reads the Law to the King and when she finds him obdurate, gives him such a tongue lashing that we practically see him squirming on his jewelled throne and wishing he were elsewhere. The story as the epic tells it in the swinging narrative style, is powerful though rough hewn. It reflects the epic tone and the way of life of the heroic age. But to Kālidāsa, it provides the bare bones of a story which he has shaped into an intricate plot structure to produce a deeply moving play that probes and asks questions. Kālidāsa has drastically changed his sources to convey his own vision of life and his view of certain problems which seem to have deeply concerned him. The epic story has only two characters, Śakuntalā and Duḥṣanta, with Kaṇva making a brief appearance. In the play, the conception of the two main characters is totally different. Kaṇva is an

important figure and we have all the minor characters which are the dramatist's creations, for which there is not even a hint in the epic story. Kālidāsa has also introduced the curse and the king's loss of memory and the Ring as the token of recognition. The story of the Ring might have been part of some old tale, folk or fairy tale, which is lost. The epic story has a happy ending. An incorporeal voice heard by everyone in the Hall of Assembly testifies to the truth of Śakuntalā's words and accepted as proof of marriage and the legitimacy of the son. The end of Kālidāsa's play is different; it is fundamentally *open-ended.*

I venture to suggest that the characterization of the hero and heroine and the general mood of the play might be influenced by the old, lost tale of the apsarā Śakuntalā, of which only a tantalizing hint remains embedded in the Vedic text referred to earlier. Śakuntalā's close association with nature, her kinship with tree-divinities (yakṣīs) and the reference to her as the guardian deity of the Hermitage, point to this. The terms in which Duḥṣanta talks of his meeting with her : "Was it a dream? a magical vision?. . . ." and the frequent use of the word *moha* (and *sam-moha*) which has several meanings such as wonder, illusion or delusion, to mention a few in this context, also point in this direction. Other meanings of *moha* are: bewilderment, perplexity, the inability to discriminate. It is a state of mind hovering between different planes of consciousness, where the real and the imagined are interfused as in the portrait-episode in Act 6, which the pragmatist Māḍhavya would characterize as being on the verge of madness. In fact it is one of the last stages in the progress of an unhappy lover which leads to death, as laid down in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra.* The delusion under which the king labours is brought on by the curse, ostensibly. The operation of the curse is described in images of veiling, darkness, blindness and drunkenness with its unsettling consequences. We might single out as an example the comparison with a man who sees but does not recognize the object, who then infers its appearance and disappearance from traces (or a *token*) left behind (7.31). The curse and the manner in which it operates is related to the problem of recognition. It should therefore not be treated, as is often done, simply as a device to gloss over the unpleasant side of Duḥṣanta's nature; his proneness to philandering, the streak of callousness in him verging on cruelty, his self-indulgence; or to exonerate him from the blame of harshly repudiating Śakuntalā and in so doing showing disrespect to a great sage. That might very well be one of the purposes of the curse. Kālidāsa's audience would have been as mixed as any audience at any time anywhere; and their responses would have varied, as in the case of audiences now. To see the image of a great monarch, a hero of the celebrated Puru dynasty which held a special place in story and therefore in the popular imagination, tarnished by ignoble

behaviour without cause, was (and is still with some) bound to have been emotionally difficult to accept. To strip a people of cherished myths is not to be lightly undertaken. But as the curse can be seen and interpreted in more than one way, it ought to be considered as the means which Kālidāsa uses to explore different states of consciousness and to probe beneath the surface of Duḥṣanta's personality.

While the loss of the Ring and the loss of memory resulting from the curse, provides the necessary complication in the plot structure, there is something else to which Kālidāsa alerts us. He directs us to question the whole idea of furnishing tangible proof for all those things in life we take on trust: love, constancy, fidelity. In Act 6, while the king and Māḍhavya discuss the circumstances in which the Ring has been lost, Miśrakeśī makes a significant observation: "Does a love like this need a token of recognition? How can that be?" I would take it that she refers to the love of both Śakuntalā and the king at this point. There are many instances in the literature of the world where this question needs to be asked: in the *Rāmāyaṇa* when Sita is asked to prove her chastity by undergoing the ordeal of fire a second time to allay the suspicions of the public; in Shakespeare's *Othello* and *King Lear* where proof of fidelity and of filial love is demanded, with tragic consequences. Śakuntalā is placed in a situation where she is unable to furnish proof of her marriage to the king who has in the meantime forgotten her. The royal signet ring which is the mark of authority and used to stamp documents to validate them (perhaps to stamp objects too, to prove the legitimacy of ownership) has gained an added importance and status. Śakuntalā is recognized or not recognized by virtue of its presence or its absence. As the play progresses, this Ring, an inanimate thing "a mindless thing", as the king describes it, becomes a character in the drama and plays a role. Its fall and loss goes hand in hand with the fall of Śakuntalā's fortunes and the loss of memory of the king and his fall into delusion and deep dejection; its finding brings awakening and pain. The theme of knowing and re-cognition hinges on the presence or absence of the Ring.

Now we ought to examine the comic dimension in the plays, delineated through the charachterization of the vidūṣaka in each play, the function he serves and the role he plays. The vidūṣaka is an important character in drama. The term is variously translated as clown, jester, buffoon, none of which really comes close enough to the meaning of the Sanskrit word. For this reason, I am using the Sanskrit term in my discussion of the character.

While it is possible to derive two meanings from the term, 'vidūṣaka', namely, (a) a figure of fun, because he is usually ill-favoured and physically handicapped; (b) one who makes fun of others, of all, including his own self, the fact is that in Kālidāsa's plays, he is hardly ever made fun of on

account of his appearance. True, Nipuṇikā, Irāvatī's maid and confidante in *Vikramorvaśīyam*, refers to the vidūṣaka, Mānavaka, as sitting quite still like a painted monkey in a picture. And he himself, in the last act refers to himself as a monkey. Despite the occasional disparaging remark, the vidūṣaka is treated with respect, as a Brahmin and more importantly as the king's closest friend and childhood companion. 'Vayasya' is the affectionate term used by the kings addressing the vidūṣakas in private, meaning a person 'of the same age'. Similarly, the vidūṣaka addresses his friend and master the king as 'vayasya' in private. The vidūṣaka is a constant companion of the nāyaka, the king. When he is not by the side of the king, he is invariably away on some personal errand looking after his friend and lord's amorous affairs. Thus, a relationship of deep affection and trust exists between king and vidūṣaka reflected even in the tone of their conversation, in private as well as public situations. It has the easy familiarity of two persons who have grown up together from early childhood. In the vidūṣaka's company, the king is able to put off his regalia and royal manner, both actual and figurative; put aside his 'public image', remove himself from the pomp and splendour of royalty and from the pressures of the Court and public office, and relax. The monarch can be himself with his friend, the vidūṣaka as he can with no one else.

Within the broad outlines of the accepted 'type' or stock character, viewed as the figure of fun, witty, a shrewd observer and commentator on human foibles, each one of the three vidūṣakas created by Kālidāsa is different. They are not typical. I would at this point offer the suggestion that none of Kālidāsa's characters is 'typical'; not the nāyaka nor the nāyikā and certainly not the vidūṣaka. Each one is an individual. To say that nāyakas are dhirodatta (in Kālidāsa's plays) is not very meaningful. They do not always act as if they possessed those qualities that are traditionally ascribed to a dhirodātta nāyaka. To give an example, Agnimitra does not always act out of great nobility or with much considerateness (dāksiṇya) to his many wives. He is in, in all the heartless stratagems that Gautama thinks up which cause great pain and suffering physical and mental to the Queen Consort, Dhāriṇī; for instance the tampering with the swing that causes Dhāriṇī a grievous fall. The cruellest trick played by Gautama with the nāyaka's knowledge and wholehearted encouragement and moral support is the fake snake-bite used as a ruse to get hold of the Queen's serpent-seal-ring. The truth is that it would be difficult to write a good play, let alone a great play by delineating "perfection". All three of the nāyakas come out as self-indulgent and given to excessively sentimental expression of the ecstasies of being in love and lamentations over the lack of fulfillment of that love. On the other hand, Agnimitra is also depicted as a shrewd politician and

admirable statesman, fully alert to the interests of the empire. Both Purūrava and Duḥṣanta are great warriors by all accounts and so was the historical Agnimitra (In the play his valour is simply alluded to in Act 5 by the chamberlain, Maudgalya). That is undeniable. But we see them presented mostly as lovers; and not very considerate lovers displaying dāksiṇya.

Each one of the vidūṣakas is an individual. As an integral part of the structuring of each play and reflecting its tone, the vidūṣaka in each play is characterized to fit the role suited for that specific play, which the dramatist intends him to play to function efficiently and meaningfully in that plot structure. In *Mālavikāgnimitram* the main plot is located in the antaḥpura and pramadavana, the enclosed world with a polygamous-concubinage setup that is rife with jealousies and intrigue and jockeying for power and status. The small, enclosed world not only mirrors the power game played in the larger world outside, the world of geopolitical issues and concerns; it is more importantly a close-up of that world of ambition and political intrigue, and the manner in which that game is played in that world of historical events that the dramatist has selected to frame the small intimate world of 'love and romance' in the "enclosed garden", the vidūṣaka's world. Gautama knows no other world. He belongs to nó other world. Here he sits in ease and comfort with good food and delicious sweets always at hand in plenty. He sits quietly spinning his secret web of intrigue having carefully planned his strategy and enlisted the help of interested parties in the Mālavikā-project (Kauśikī, Bakulāvalikā); having appointed spies (Bakulāvalikā, Devasenā) to keep him well-informed; even twisting the arm of the physician Dhruvasiddhi and fooling Mādhavikā, the dour guard of the underground treasure chamber. Gautama, master of stratagem, and manipulation, expert in thinking up tricks and carrying them off successfully, moves in this world of elegance and beauty weaving his way in and out of the labyrinth of intrigue he himself has created. And he pilots successfully his friend and master to the latter's desired goal, the possession of Mālavikā. In the world of realpolitik if we consider the Chief Minister, Vāhataka as master of policy and political strategy, in the world of the pramadavana, Gautama is undoubtedly master of strategem. He denies having any knowledge of policy. But he does. At the close of Act 4 Irāvatī says after learning something about the deception practised on the keeper (Mādhavikā) of the underground treasure-chamber:

IRĀVATĪ (to herself): Yes, I see, it all fits. There is no doubt that this is one of the schemes of that knave, Gautama ....(*looking at the vidūṣaka; aloud*); So, this is the policy framed by the Minister for Amorous Affairs, I see.

GAUTAMA: Lady, if I have studied one little phrase that could be called "policy", may I forget even the Gāyatrī mantra.

Earlier on in Act I, after the brief exchange of king and chief minister, Agnimitra noticing Gautama entering remarks facetiously:

Here comes my Minister for Other Affairs. (Karyāntara saciva)

Vāhataka, the chief minister has carefully piloted his master, the king through the tangles of foreign policy to secure control over the southern kingdoms that were slipping away from Śuṅga suzerainty. Yajñasena who was a thorn in the side of the empire is put in his place to rule his half of Vidarbha under Vidiśā's watchful eye. Similarly, Gautama, Minister for Amorous Affairs as Irāvatī describes him with a sneer, smoothes the way for the king to gain possession of the Princess of Vidarbha, foiling all the efforts of the Queen Consort to keep the girl out of sight of the king. Gautama "manages" Agnimitra's private, personal life. Mālavikā escapes the undeserved condition of concubinage to become a queen. Her brother instead of spending his life in his cousin's prison gains a kingdom though it is only half of what his family ruled over before the feud of the two cousins led to its partition. Without intending it, Gautama complements the Chief Minister's efforts in the political sphere. If Vāhataka is the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Gautama is Minister of the Interior.

Gautama's Mālavikā-project is worked out in careful detail, step by step. First, he manipulates the two dance teachers, fanning their rivalry and making the exhibition of Mālavikā on stage before Their Majesties a matter of pride on the part of Gaṇadāsa, Mālavikā's guru. In this, Kauśikī who is Mālavikā's guardian and well-wisher plays an important role. Queen Dhāriṇī is pushed into a corner by the scheming duo because of Gaṇadāsa's ego.

After Mālavikā finishes her performance, the bards announce the noon hour. It is time for the royal lunch; and the other guru, Haradatta is not permitted to display his skill as a teacher. Did Gautama "arrange" the timing of this as well? We cannot put anything past his scheming ingenuity.

Next he tampers with the swing and causes the Queen to fall and hurt her foot badly. Mālavikā is the obvious choice it seems, to put on the Queen's own jewelled anklets and kick the tardy golden asoka into blooming. Why is Irāvatī overlooked by the Queen? And further, why does the Queen make a promise to Mālavikā that if the aśoka responded to the dohada rite and bloomed within a stipulated period of time she would grant Mālavikā whatever she desired most? Had Dhāriṇī already decided to consent to her royal husband's union with a girl who at that time was only an attendant in her employ? An intriguing thought! Kālidāsa can often be quite ambiguous,

even cryptic, and provide his audience (and us readers) a mere hint of what will probably happen or not happen. Certain assumptions are left it seems to the audience-readers' imagination. One might speculate and conclude that the Queen Consort knew very well that her royal husband,

> greedy as ever for fresh honey
> .... (*Sak*: 5:8:2)

was incorrigible.

The dramatist also makes the Queen say that she had Mālavikā and her companion, Bakulāvalikā fettered and placed in the dungeon only out of regard for Irāvatī who had complained to her about the two girls (4.2.-)

The aśoka tree obliges and bursts into spectacular blossoming. The Queen's promise to Mālavikā has to be fulfilled. The way is clear for the recognition of Mālavikā. Her bridal and exaltation as queen (a junior one) only strengthens the king's control over Vidarbha.

Now comes Gautama's *tour de force*, tricking Queen Dhāriṇī into giving her signet ring. It is a master stroke devised by Gautama's fertile but somewhat crooked imagination. And the final step is to arrange for Devasenā to come with a fake message from the chief minister to enable the king to go with Devasenā by a secret path (*gūdehna pathā*) to meet Mālavikā in the pramadavana. Gautama's first attempt to get Mālavikā into the king's arms after her stunning dance performance had failed when Irāvatī, drunk, burst in unexpectedly on them. The second attempt also fails on account of Irāvatī's arrival on the scene; but it also completes Irāvatī's discomfiture and fall from grace.

Dhāriṇī accepts the inevitable. She has tried hard, tried desperately to resist but failed. She makes one last observation. Veiling her disapproval in a smile, she says to her philandering husband, pointing to the gorgeous aśoka tree:

> We have tried to make this aśoka tree
> a bower for trysts for my
> noble lord, to meet and enjoy the company of young women.
> (5:8:.-1-3)

There is deep sorrow under the surface in these words, a sense of humiliation, irony and a veiled reference to the king's attempts to meet and make love to Mālavikā. At this point, unaware of Mālavikā's royal parentage, the Queen sees her simply as a gift from her brother; a talented girl but only an attendant and part of her entourage. Though it is not said in so many words, Mālavikā is perceived by everyone, not as a bride, as a queen, but the king's new concubine. The arrival of the girls from Vidarbha sent by Mādhavasena as part of the "rich gifts" changes the whole picture.

The term "queen" is applied to Mālavikā for the first time at this point. Dhāriṇī is stricken with remorse for the second time when she sadly comments that treating Mālavikā as a servant was like using precious sandalwood to make sandals for her feet. She feels guilt and shame for an act done in ignorance of the truth. The first time that she exhibits this totally unnecessary feeling of guilt and remorse is when she is lying in pain after her fall and Gautama rushes in with his piece of play acting. Dhāriṇī feels that *she* has been the unwitting cause of her husband's dear friend standing before her close to death. She could have easily said: "Why did you not ask one of the girls in the gardens to pick the flowers you wished to present me with"? But she does not. Instead, feeling a needless sense of guilt and compassion for Gautama, she readily hands over her ring. In many of Kālidāsa's works there are tragic moments. This is one of these tragic moments. Tragic moments are presented most clearly in the last two works, *Meghadūtam* and *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*. In the poem we do not know if the yakṣa was united with his "beloved" (*kāntā*); whether she survived the sorrow of separation; whether the cloud, an insensate thing, elemental, "Blended of mists and light, winds and water" would reach its destination to deliver the message to the "beloved" fallen "prey to calamity". There are no certainties in the poem's world. In the play, at the end of Act 5 the play teeters on the edge of tragedy and is pulled back.

In *Mālavikāgnimitram* when the Queen, bedridden and in pain due to her fall from the swing engineered by Gautama, feels distressed at his faked, fatal accident and out of compassion hands over her ring hoping that it would save his life, it is one of these tragic moments in the play. Dhāriṇī is alone; everyone including her husband is ranged against her. In *Vikramorvaśīyam*, Auśīnarī, the Royal Princess of Kasi (as she is invariably referred to) is totally rejected by the king, even though she has literally worshipped him as if he were divinity (3.13.+) and has sworn calling upon the "glorious Moon", Purūrava's grandparent as witness that she accepts the woman her revered lord yearns for and who in turn wishes to be loved by him and consents to their union. Yet she is shut out from the consecration of Urvaśī's son Prince Ayus as heir-apparent. She is not presented on stage at the play's close and is deliberately excluded from the blessings of the Bharatavākya. She too is alone. This is a tragic moment in the play. In *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, Śakuntalā, humiliated and harshly repudiated by Duḥṣanta and disowned by her father's pupils who leave her to her fate, stands alone on alien soil, helpless. She cries out to the earth to open and take her in.

> O gracious goddess, Mother Earth, open wide and take me in. (*Sak* : 5:32:+).

This too is a tragic moment in the play. It is self-consciously reminiscent of Sita's words in the Uttara Kanda of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, when Rama demands that she subject herself to a second ordeal by fire.

However, Queen Dhāriṇī, having weathered the storms in the world of the antaḥpura, survives. She is grateful for the safety of her young son and his brilliant victory, and for her father-in-law's gesture of amity and wish that setting aside misunderstanding and differences, the family should celebrate the Aśvamedha Sacrifice together legitimizing the Śuṅga dynasty and the succession. Fortune was smiling a little on her and her son. Out of gratitude she offers the king the gift of Mālavikā in marriage. Prompted by her wisdom she has decided that battling her royal husband's philandering tendencies would be counterproductive. She assesses the situation in its larger context, weighs the pros and cons of the problem and gives in gracefully, persuading Irāvatī to do the same. One cannot ignore the fact that there is a streak of callousness in all three nāyakas: Agnimitra, Purūrava and Duḥṣanta. However, Duḥṣanta is truly penitent and learns from his suffering, thereby becoming a better ruler. The other two reveal no change of heart.

In the first play, Gautama, the vidūṣaka encourages this callousness in Agnimitra, egging him on to pursue Mālavikā, prodding him and fanning the king's already flaming passion for her. As Mālavikā comes on stage to dance before the king and queen, Gautama whispers to Agnimitra:

> Look, look, the honey of your eyes is on its way......(1:1:+2).

And then a few lines later:

> Your Honour, you may now take a good look. The sweetness you see before you in no way belies the promise held out by the likeness, I believe. (1:1:+3-5).

He makes every effort to detain Mālavikā after her performance to enable the king to gaze on her loveliness as long as possible.

> Just a moment, my lady; have you not forgotten something? (1:5:.+1,2).

There is something unsavoury about Gautama's behaviour. More importantly a streak of malevolence is present in his character. While granting that he is a genuinely caring and affectionate friend, devoted to the king's interests (restricted to matters of sexual encounters) it cannot be denied that Gautama takes pleasure in playing the game of sneak-in-the-girl-under-the-very-nose-of-the-wife. Gautama takes a sheer delight in thinking up and planning his stratagems, at whatever cost to others (chiefly Queen Dhāriṇī) and derives satisfaction in their complete success. The play leaves one with a sense that Gautama will always take pleasure in playing this

game. The action of the main plot will go on and Gautama will always be there to see that it goes on, because it is *his* game. The other two vidūṣakas are completely different in this as in many other respects. Māṇavaka in *Vikramorvaśīyam* is not skilled in intrigue nor is he interested, it appears, in getting involved in it. Māḍhavya is different from both Gautama and Māṇavaka as will be evident when his character and role are discussed towards the end of this section.

In many respects, *Mālavikāgnimitram* is a superb play and eminently stage-worthy. The action is placed in two worlds, the private and elegant world of the antaḥpura-pramadavana and the world outside of geopolitical issues and concerns where the fate and wellbeing of empires and kingdoms are important. They are the same kind of world, cut from the same fabric of realities, of realpolitik, and they are linked closely in many complex ways as I have endeavoured to indicate at some length. Not only are the nāyaka, King Agnimitra, his father, the emperor, General Puṣyamitra and his son Prince Vasumitra historical personages, but characters such as Dhāriṇī, the Queen Consort, Mālavikā, Vāhataka, Vidiśā's Chief Minister, the rival claimants to the Vidarbha throne Yajñasena and Mādhavasena were probably historical persons only the names being changed, perhaps (or perhaps not even that). Kālidāsa would have had at his disposal records now lost; material in the form of ballads, stories and so on about these personages. The oral tradition in India is very rich and varied and some historical information can be and is available in this oral literature; as for instance, in the Prithviraj Raso and the southern Indian ballad of the extraordinarily brave chieftain in *The Ballad of Ginji Fortress* which was current even during the childhood of this writer. It is a ballad about the chieftain ruling over a small kingdom who waged a bitter guerrilla war against the Europeans in defence of his little kingdom. Some editors of Kālidāsa's plays belittle the first play because it uses historical matter that is not the pure invention of the dramatist. It is difficult to accept this criticism as valid. What is important and what has to be critically assessed is how the dramatist uses his historical material and how successful he is in the enterprise. Further one might view myth and legend as historical in its own times; in proto-history perhaps; or at least have some basis in actual history. The mythic could in some cases be a dimension added to historical material over the centuries.

In his next two plays the dramatist places his characters and action in two worlds at different levels, this terrestrial world and another world, the mythic world where mythic time prevails. There are always risks involved in such choices. *Vikramorvaśīyam* is in some ways a problematic play. There is a contrived air about some of the structural features : the double curse,

the finding of the Saṅgamaṇīya gem, the gem of reunion, the timely descent of Nārada at the end. The total repudiation of Auśīnarī, Royal Princess of Kāsī, quite gratuitous, remains unresolved in the play. The character of Urvaśī is aesthetically somewhat unsatisfying. It is difficult to come to terms with it. An attempt has been made in the earlier part of this section to find an aesthetic rationale for it. Whether it works for others as it does for this critic is another matter. Some of the "problematics" is part of the original source. The dialogue of Urvaśī - Purūrava in the *Ṛgveda* makes the careful reader wonder if parts of the original poem are missing. There is an air of mystery surrounding this haunting poem. There is no mystery in the play. The Urvaśī of the *Rgveda* is stern, uncompromising if cryptic in some of her statements to the king. There are resonances out of a distant past in the Vedic poem; echoes of some long-forgotten story. Kālidāsa's Urvaśī is not like that. Therein lies the problem perhaps.

A few comments about the vidūṣaka in the middle play, Māṇavaka, ought to be made at this point.

Māṇavaka is a kind of ideal vidūṣaka though he is a mediocre one at that. He has neither the brilliance of misapplied ingenuity and moral waywardness of Gautama nor the profoundity of Māḍhavya. Devoted to the king, his friend and master as all vidūṣakas are, he serves as a convenient, built-in audience of one for the king. He is a good listener, attentive and sympathetic to Purūrava unburdening himself, indulging in endless raptures over the beloved's charms, and lamentation over the lack of fulfillment of his passion for this ethereal lady, Urvaśī. Unlike Gautama, Māṇavaka takes no part in "managing" the love-life of the king. The dramatist has given that function to the nāyikā. Urvaśī with some help from her friend, Citralekhā, "manages" the affair very successfully. She is equally successful in "managing" both the king's personal life and his life as king. In an ultimate sense she "manages" the affairs of the empire as well. We see her taking Purūrava who is frankly derelict in his duties to his empire and his subjects, on an extended honeymoon to the distant paradise of the Gandhamādana groves. The extended honeymoon lasts for many years as she enjoys love's pleasures until she is changed into a non-human form and then restored to her human form and condition by the gem of reunion. She reminds the king that it was time to return to the capital, Pratiṣṭhāna to resume his duties as ruler to avoid public censure and discontent (4:42.+). It is interesting to note that for the first time in the play, Urvaśī turning back to woman from her condition of a lowly vine does not put herself and her desires first but gives a thought to her lover and his kingdom and his subjects. Within the terms of her guru Bharata's curse and her lord Indra's extenuation of the stringent condition of that curse, Urvaśī "manages" very

well. It is also noteworthy that she is the only nāyikā to break successfully the close bond between king and vidūṣaka. Her consuming passion for Purūrava takes him over completely. She "possesses" him leaving no room for any other person.

Māṇavaka is also the only vidūṣaka to display some sympathy for the unfortunate Queen Consort, Auśīnarī. The repudiation of Auśīnarī and total exclusion from all rituals and festivities has been already noted. The exalted title of "Devī" is not Auśīnarī's at the close of the play. Urvaśī, thanks to Indra's compassion, *is* the Devi; her son is the heir apparent. We question this total rejection of the reigning Queen Consort whom Kālidāsa draws as a noble, dignified queen "invested with a majesty in no way inferior to that of Śacī, Indra's queen" as Urvaśī remarks; and a loyal and loving wife. To the vidūṣaka who wishes to know her reason for giving her husband up so easily and asks, "Is he not dear to you"? She replies:

> You fool, I am concerned for my lord's happiness even at the cost of my own (3:14. –1,2)

It can only be suggested that here is an example of extreme self-abnegation. If so it is also an example of misdirected selflessness because in the end she is left with nothing.

This heartless and gratuitously cruel treatment of the Queen Consort and the "fall" of Urvaśī makes the play problematic. Urvaśī is an immortal. She is cursed to fall into the condition of mortality, a severe punishment for celestials. She falls again, further down in the Hierarchy of Being, into a lowly vine, a plant rooted in the soil. The dramatist appears to be making a point of this. But it is not clear what precisely the point is. Things remain unresolved in this play. Part of the difficulty lies in the characterization of Urvaśī. She is neither immortal, a celestial, nor quite a mortal. Therein lies the problem perhaps. How to handle this character that hangs suspended between two worlds, like Triśanku?

In *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, the action is placed in different worlds at different levels. In this, his final and finest play, in contrast to the middle play, Kālidāsa has everything worked out beautifully, structurally and aesthetically. The title itself rouses great expectations and excitement that are fully satisfied at the close of the play. How to *read* the title? Is it The Recognition of Śakuntalā? Or, Śakuntalā Re-cognized? Or is it The Token of Recognition and Śakuntalā? Or, the Remembrance/Recollection of Śakuntalā? Perhaps, the Acknowledgement of Śakuntalā? There are many ways of *reading* and understanding the title. All these meanings are contained in the Sanskrit title. "Abhijñāna" is a multivalent word.

Māḍhavya, the vidūṣaka, will be looked at from several angles. He is an

ironic commentator on human foibles found in the gilded court as well as the green world. He is an astute but kindly critic of his friend and master the king. Above all he serves as a foil to the bards and panegyrists, the chamberlain and the general and to the king, Duḥṣanta. He deflates everyone around him through the exercise of a sharp and often caustic wit, especially the king. He does not spare himself either.

An ill-favoured hunchback, Māḍhavya, makes the world, the target of his wit. And this includes him; for Māḍhavya can laugh at himself. For example, at the opening of Act 2, we hear him talking to the King about the bent reed growing by the river bank, buffeted by the force of the current and tottering "to and fro with the grace of a hunchback's gait". Māḍhavya's wry laughter is not without an element of pathos, a hallmark of most clowns and jesters who play the fool.

As the friend and confidant of the king, Māḍhavya is a privileged person and this fact taken together with the capacity to laugh at himself, makes him the ironic commentator in the play. His wit is no respecter of persons; even the Queen receives her share of his barbed comments and the king himself is not exempt. There are several examples in Act 2 where Māḍhavya slips in some pointed criticism of the king, under the guise of affectionate banter. On entering, he first treats the audience to the sorry tale of his aching joints. His body is battered, galloping all day over rough paths following the king whose lust for the chase seems to be boundless. (Hunting is regarded as one of the eight vices that princes are warned against in manuals on ethics). He misses the good life: good food, rest, sleep and 'sweet dumplings', needless to say. This is Māḍhavya's *mask*; using it, he plays his role true to form, pretending to be slow on the uptake, but sharp and astute as he slips in his ironic comments smoothly and adroitly. He stands like a broken reed, supporting himself on his stick and when the king asks, "And what has paralysed your limbs?" knowing full well what Māḍhavya's ploy is likely to be, the latter seizes the cue he has been waiting for. (King and jester understand each other well).

Māḍhavya : A fine thing to ask; do you hit me in the eye – and then ask why it is watering?

King: My dear friend, I do not follow; make your meaning clear.

Māḍhavya: If the bent reed by the river totters to and fro with the grace of a hunchback's gait, does it do so on its own ... hm ... or, is the force of the current the cause?

King: Why, in that case, the force of the current is the cause.

Māḍhavya: Yes, as you are, in mine.

King: And how is that?

Māḍhavya (as if angry): Go on, you abandon the affairs of the kingdom...

This is how he puts it to the king. He, Māḍhavya, the hunchback, is only an insignificant reed growing beside the river tottering, and perhaps his well-being is not that important. (We have to link this with what the king says towards the end of the Act, that he is like a river which has to divide to go round a rock, an obstacle.) But, the affairs of the kingdom are a different matter; and the King is neglecting them to lead the primitive life of foresters, chasing wild animals (and a girl), unmindful of his duties. However, Māḍhavya does not push the point too far; after all Duḥṣanta is the King and kings could suddenly turn against the best of friends if provoked. But he has made his point to the king and to the audience, and lets it rest there. A little later he makes an oblique reference to the same point when he tells the General, Bhadrasena, that the king is recovering his true nature, and asks the General not to fan the king's lust for the chase but to go to hell himself.

Again, as he is leaving, rather put out, the king stops him to ask for "help in a matter that will not cause you the least bit of exertion". Māḍhavya knows what the "matter" is but pretends not to and asks rather ingenuously. "Like tasting sweet dumplings, perhaps"? Māḍhavya's witty comments effectively deflate the King whenever the latter makes self-serving statements or holds forth on the theme of Śakuntalā's charms. When the jester remarks drily that there was little point in attempting to meet Śakuntalā once more since she was the daughter of a sage and therefore beyond the his reach, Duḥṣanta retorts with a flourish: "You are a dull fellow, Māḍhavya. Has Duḥṣanta's heart ever been drawn to a forbidden object?" And proceeds to explain Śakuntalā's real parentage, to which Māḍhavya's tart comment is: Oh! That's how it is, eh? Like one whose palate jaded by enjoying delicate candies made of the sweetest dates hankers after a taste of the sour tamarind, you too, Sir, sated with the pleasures of the royal apartments ... are consumed with a passion for this hermit-maiden". Māḍhavya deflates the king's craving for beautiful women by placing it on the same level as his own for sweet dumplings and candied dates; and further, sets against Duḥṣanta's phrase describing Śakuntalā as the flower of the fragrant jasmine, his own of the sour tamarind. Again, to the king's rapturous outburst regarding Śakuntalā's shy responses that concludes with: "Love neither shone radiant nor was it concealed". Madhavya's quick retort is: "What, Sir, did you then expect her to leap into your arms as soon as she set eyes on Your Honour"? And again, "Go quickly, Sir, and rescue her before she falls into the hands of some forest-dwelling hermit with greasy head and hair plastered down with *iṅgudi* oil".

Māḍhavya provides the element of wit and humour so necessary to offset the element of romance in the play. His sharp comments serve as the tart tamarind to the cloying sweetness of Duḥṣanta's declamation on love,

its raptures and its pain. They also bring an ironic and critical perspective into a Court where there is considerable adulation of the king; for Māḍhavya serves as a foil to the Court bards whose duties are to compose and sing hymns of praise to the reigning monarch. His refreshing wit blows in some fresh air into the hothouse atmosphere of Duḥṣanta's court.

Though Māḍhavya shoots off his witty barbs at the king whenever an opportunity presents itself, he is a loyal and true friend, supportive and not given to flattery. But this relationship of king and jester has to come to an end before the play proceeds to its conclusion. At the end of Act 6, Māḍhavya is dismissed, not casually, or with disdain, but affectionately and with honour. He is entrusted with an important assignment, to inform Chief Minister Piśuna, about the momentous mission the king is setting out on and the circumstances leading up to it, and to instruct the minister to carry on the government in his absence. Māḍhavya accepts the royal command and leaves with quiet dignity. We never see him again for he is no longer needed as the king's companion, to amuse and divert him. His witty comments, his homely wisdom spiced with time-worn proverbs containing sound practical sense are not needed either; not where Duḥṣanta is headed for. And Māḍhavya has no place in that other world, in the mythic world of Act 7; neither in the vanguard of Indra's battles against the dark forces nor in the golden world of the Primal Pair, Mārīca and Aditi.

Duḥṣanta is no longer the king he was. He has grown in understanding and has learnt compassion and caring for others. This is implied in the ruling he makes, which almost sounds like the setting up of a legal precedent, that the estate of the wealthy merchant who died in a shipwreck should not be confiscated by the state but be inherited by his unborn child. This ruling has an extension in the form of a royal proclamation, that the king would be a friend and kinsman to all his subjects who follow the *right path*. Duḥṣanta had to experience the grief of childlessness for himself and realize the dangers to an heirless kingdom before he is able to understand and feel for his subjects. He seems to have grown in another way too. After a long spell of penitential grief, he has gained the capacity to know and value true love, which is a matter of more than the delight of the eye and of pleasure. When he meets Śakuntalā again in Mārīca's Hermitage, he *sees* her, knowing her true worth. It is recognition, or *abhijñānam*, the highly suggestive word which forms the first part of the compound word that is the title of the play—*Abhijñānaśākuntalam*. The carnal knowledge he had of Śakuntalā which had carried him to dizzying heights of rapture only to plunge him into deep despair under the weight of an overwhelming guilt, is transformed. Māḍhavya has no place in this changed world.

Initially, Māḍhavya has no place in the 'green world' situated within

deep forests. With the kind of opinion he expresses regarding ascetics, long beards, "with greasy heads and hair plastered down with *iṅgudi* oil", he cannot possibly feel at ease in Mārīca's Hermitage. In fact he would have been miserable in the 'golden world'. The jester has his feet firmly planted on the earth; we cannot imagine him sitting at the feet of Mārīca and Aditi hymning their praises. In this connection Māḍhavya's words to Duḥṣanta when he is released by Mātali at the close of Act 6, are significant: "He was about to slay me as if I were a sacrificial beast, and here ... you welcome him ...." The denouement towards which the play is now leading, demands that Māḍhavya be *sacrificed*.

The vidūṣaka or jester of Sanskrit drama belongs essentially to the world of the Court, especially to the world of jealousies and intrigue of the royal harem. Apart from the aged chamberlain, he is the only male permitted entry into the inner and private apartments of the palace. This is the vidūṣaka's world where he practises his craft, his talent for manipulation to bring the hero's many love affairs to a successful conclusion and to placate the other wives (or queens) or trick them into accepting the latest object of the hero's affections as co-wife or queen, as the case may be. However, Māḍhavya is not the typical vidūṣaka. He is hardly involved in intrigue. As Śakuntalā is a different kind of heroine, Māḍhavya is a different kind of jester and king's companion. The heroine and the jester never meet in this play. With exquisite poetic tact, Kālidāsa keeps them and their worlds apart. Māḍhavya, as we noted earlier, never enters the 'green world'; he stands on its fringes complaining about his aching joints. At the end of Act 2, he is shunted off to the capital, ostensibly to take the king's place as a surrogate son in the Queen Mother's rites to ensure the succession. (That Duḥṣanta is childless is made quite clear at the play's beginning.) He is absent in Act 3, where Duḥṣanta courts Śakuntalā and their Gandharva marriage takes place. In the trial scene in Act 5, Māḍhavya is again not present when the ascetics and Gautamī arrive with Śakuntalā; he has been despatched immediately before this to pacify Queen Hamsavatī, smarting under Duḥṣanta's neglect of her. The reason is that it would have been fatal to the plot to have had Māḍhavya around at that point. In the two earlier plays of Kālidāsa, the vidūṣaka is thrown into close contact with the heroine (*nāyikā*). But all Māḍhavya knows about Śakuntalā is what the King tells him; he hears a great deal about her from Duḥṣanta; he sees her in a portrait done by Duḥṣanta. Śakuntalā is presented to the jester only through the eyes of the hero, *nāyakā*. And unlike the jesters in the other two plays, Māḍhavya is bored by the whole matter of Śakuntalā. No one from the Court comes into close contact with the heroine of this play. In fact no one belonging to the Royal Court gains entry into her world, the 'green world'.

The king's retinue and companions only mill around its periphery, creating terror and confusion. And they leave with the jester at the close of Act 2 when he departs in state in the role of the king's younger brother, the heir apparent. When the play begins to gather all the threads (the sūtradhāra, the director-producer, is the one who holds all the threads in his hands), and wind to its conclusion, the true heir apparent, Śakuntalā's son, Sarva-Damana, is in place, acknowledged as son and heir by the king. In these and in many other respects, some of which have been discussed or touched upon, this play is totally different in tone, treatment of character and issues from the other two plays. The moral and poetic vision that structures *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* is unique as it is in *Meghadūtam;* and it is somewhat similar. This seems to suggest that they were written at about the same time and were the poet's last works. There is a gentle melancholy under the surface in both works even in the happiest moments, an undercurrent of regret at the passing of the first flush of happiness of a newly-wed pair of lovers. In *Meghadūtam* when the lovers are reunited, if ever they are, we sense that their love would be a chastened one. In (112), the poem draws a contrast between *bhoga* or sensual enjoyment and *prema* or deep affection; between passion and love. This contrast is more fully articulated in the play. At the end, the glow of youthful and exuberant love and happiness of the first and third acts of the play has faded into the common light of duty. The focus and interest shifts to the son born of those first moments of intense passion. The last stanzas of the poem are coloured by a certain tentativeness of statement, and a hope for the reunion of the yakṣa and his beloved wife. In the play, the long period of penance for Śakuntalā and repentance for Duḥṣanta ends in a reconciliation based on mutual respect and trust that brings some measure of happiness for both by finding a common ground in the child and his future.

There are moments of overhanging gloom, even darkness in *Abhijñānaśākuntalam.* There are moments too of bitter irony accompanied by flashes of pure good humour. But the play, though it has had its tragic moments, closes on a note of serenity, expressing the poet's vision of peace and harmony in a world where order has been restored. The little prince Sarva-Damana, All-Tamer, will grow up and be known as Bharata, he who bears, protects and sustains the world. It is after him that the country is called Bhārata Varṣa (modern Bharat or India), the land of the Bharatas who are the people of India.

> All those born in this land before Bharata,
> All those born after, are called after his name.
>
> (*Mbh.:* 1.69.49)

MĀLAVIKĀGNIMITRAM

(Mālavikā and Agnimitra)

A Play in Five Acts

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PROLOGUE

Chanters of the Benediction

SŪTRADHĀRA	:	the Director - Producer
PĀRIPĀRŚVIKA	:	his assistant

PLAY

AGNIMITRA	:	The hero or nāyaka; son of the Śuṅga emperor, Puṣyamitra, and the Viceroy, ruling at Vidiśā, the second and western capital of the empire.
MĀLAVIKĀ	:	The heroine or nāyikā; Princess of Vidarbha who has taken refuge in the royal court at Vidiśā, in disguise, as one of the Queen's retinue.
DHĀRIṆĪ	:	The Queen-Consort.
IRĀVATĪ	:	Agnimitra's junior queen.
KAUŚIKĪ	:	Sister of the Chief Minister of Vidarbha and guardian of Mālavikā; she has also taken refuge in the court of King Agnimitra, disguised as an ascetic lady and forms part of the queen's retinue.
GAUTAMA	:	The court jester or vidūṣaka; the king's close friend and companion from childhood.
GAṆADĀSA	:	Dance instructors in the royal court of Vidiśā; patronized by the HARADATTA, Queen and the King respectively.
VĀHATAVA	:	The Chief Minister.
MAUDGALYA	:	The Chamberlain in charge of the royal household.
JAYASENĀ	:	The female security guard in charge of the antaḥpura or private wing of the palace reserved for the queens, their entourage, the princesses and ladies-in-waiting.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ (*Little Miss Bakula garland*) : The Queen's principal attendant.

KAUMUDIKĀ (*Little Miss Moonlight*) : The Queen's second attendant.

NIPUṆIKĀ (*Little Miss Smart*) : Irāvatī's trusted attendant.

SAMĀHITIKĀ : Kauśikī's personal maid.

MADHUKARIKĀ (*Little Miss Honeybee*) : Warden of the private pleasure gardens of the palace.

SĀRASAKA : A hunchback, in the Queen's retinue.

NĀGARIKĀ : One of the Queen's personal maids.

JYOTSNIKĀ
RAJANIKĀ : Two young girls, accomplished singers sent as part of the tribute of Prince Mādhavasena of Vidarbha to Agnimitra; previously in the entourage of Mālavikā.

Characters off-stage—Bards or vaitālika.

Characters only mentioned or referred to but not seen on stage.

VASUMITRA : Queen Dhāriṇī's son and heir apparent to the throne; later the third Śuṅga emperor.

PUṢYAMITRA : First emperor and founder of the Śuṅga dynasty ruling at the imperial capital of Rājagṛha (in the environs of ancient Pātalīputra, capital of the great Mauryan Empire.)

VĪRASENA : Half-brother of Queen Dhāriṇī; commander-in-chief of Agnimitra's forces and Lord of the Narmada Marches guarding the empire's southern frontiers.

YAJÑASENA
MĀDHAVASENA : Cousins, princes of the royal family of Vidarbha and rival claimants to the throne; later independent rulers of a divided kingdom of Vidarbha. The latter is Mālavikā's brother.

SUMATI : Chief Minister of Vidarbha and brother of Kauśikī; killed in the border fighting.

MĀDHAVIKĀ : Guard in charge of the royal treasury in the basement.

The scene is laid in Vidiśā, capital of the empire's eastern provinces; in the royal palace, its pleasure gardens and adjoining groves.

Time - Spring

ACT ONE

Benediction[1]

Abiding in that singular sovereignty whence flows 1
an infinitude of blessings to those who bow before Him,
yet Himself clad in a mere tiger-skin;
blending with the beloved in one single form,
yet, Himself an ascetic far above ascetics restrained
whose minds are not rapt in the world of senses
with his Eight forms investing the universe entire,
yet, Himself divested of all sense of self;
May He, the Lord, lead us out of the whirl of darkness,
empowering us to envision the Right Way.

At the close of the benediction the sūtradhāra enters.

PROLOGUE

SŪTRADHĀRA *(turning towards the greenroom)* : Ho there! Māriṣa! Would you step out, Sir?

PĀRIPĀRŚVIKA: Here I am, Your Honour.

SŪTRADHĀRA: Listen, I have been told by this learned audience to put on a play as part of the celebrations of the Spring Festival—the *Mālavikāgnimitram* by Kālidāsa. Let music sound now and the dances commence forthwith.

PĀRIPĀRŚVIKA: Oh! Sir, this does not seem right—that the audience should disregard the works of established poets such as Bhāsa, Saumilla, Kaviputra and others, and accord such great honour to the work of Kālidāsa, a modern poet.

SŪTRADHĀRA: Come now, my young friend, you speak without having given much serious thought to this matter. Consider this:

Not all works are good because they are merely old; 2
no work should be scorned merely because it's new;
connoisseurs judge and honour what is best ;
the unlettered go by the views of others.

PĀRIPĀRŚVIKA: Your Honour is the best judge.

SŪTRADHĀRA: Well then, bestir yourself, Sir. For here I stand :

> Like Queen Dhāriṇī's attendant over there trained 3
> to serve her implicitly, eager to carry out forthwith
> the command of the audience here
> that I have already accepted with utmost reverence.

End of Prologue

Enter the Queen's attendant.

ATTENDANT: I come bearing Queen Dhāriṇī's command to ask the revered guru Gaṇadāsa how well Mālavikā is progressing in mastering the calita[2] sequence of dance that she very recently began learning. I better look for him in the music room. (*she turns around*)

Enter a second attendant of the Queen holding an ornament in her hand.

FIRST ATTENDANT (*noticing the second*) : Hallo there! Kaumudikā; it's you. But why so preoccupied, dear friend? You pass right by me without throwing a glance in my direction!

SECOND ATTENDANT: Oho! Bakulāvalikā, dearest friend; I richly deserve this reproach of yours, don't I? The truth is that I was so taken by the beauty of this signet ring with its serpent-seal[3] which I collected just this moment at the jeweller's, that I simply missed seeing you.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ (*looking at the ring*) : It certainly catches one's eye, doesn't it though? See; see how its lustrous rays are shooting up; it makes your fingers appear as if they are bursting into flowers!

KAUMUDIKĀ: But tell me, good friend, where were you going?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: I was on my way to do an errand for Her Majesty the Queen. Her Majesty has commanded me to contact guru Gaṇadāsa and get his report on Mālavikā's progress in dancing and judge how she is shaping under his tutelage.

KAUMUDIKĀ: Now tell me something, my friend. Despite the careful and elaborate precautions being taken to keep her out of His Majesty's sight, how did our lord manage to get a look at Mālavikā?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Ah! That. He simply saw her in a painting—standing close to Her Majesty.

KAUMUDIKĀ: O, really ? How intriguing! And how did that happen ?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: It happened this way, listen. Her Majesty was visiting the

picture gallery. While there, she stood long in front of a painting executed by a master painter, its colours still fresh, laid on that very moment it seemed. And in the meantime, who should come there but the king himself ...

KAUMUDIKĀ: And then? Go on, go on, and then what happened?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: After the customary greetings, His Majesty sat down next to Her Majesty, on the same seat. He too started closely observing the painting ... and noticed Mālavikā among the ladies of the Queen's retinue ... saw her quite close to Her Majesty ... and ... he asked ....

KAUMUDIKĀ: Naturally. And what did our lord say ?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: I'll tell you. "This girl, my queen," said our lord, "a girl of such exquisite loveliness ... never seen before .... what might her name be ... if I might ask ?"

KAUMUDIKĀ: Forms of incomparable beauty do elicit this kind of admiration; that is true. What happened next ?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Noting that the Queen remained silent, ignoring his query, His Majesty grew suspicious, you see, and persisted, asking the same question over and over again, pressing the Queen for an answer. When Her Majesty in turn persisted in her obdurate silence, the little princess, Vasulakṣmi piped up saying brightly: "Why, papa dear, this is Mālavikā, don't you know?"

KAUMUDIKĀ (*smiling*) : How spoken like a child, truly! And then what happened; tell me.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: What is there to tell? The obvious, of course. Mālavikā is now even more carefully guarded, kept from being seen by His Majesty.

KAUMUDIKĀ: I sce; well then, you had better carry out your errand and I shall be on my way to deliver this ring to Her Majesty. (*she exits*)

BAKULĀVALIKĀ (*turns round and looks*): Ah! There he is, our worthy dance instructor, Guru Gaṇadāsa... just coming out of the theatre. Let me meet him and speak to him. (*turns around*)

Enter Ganadāsa.

GAṆADĀSA: We all set great store by our very own hereditary vocation; granted that's so; still .... the high esteem in which we hold ours, the art of the theatre, is surely not without justification. And for these reasons:

This art of magical beauty, ancient sages celebrate, 4
deeming it a sacred rite of adoration,
eye-delighting to the Immortals.
Shaping this art in two distinctive modes[4], the Great Dancer,
Rudra, danced each with one half of the single body
He shared in blended harmony with Uma, the goddess-consort.
Displayed in it is the stuff of human experience
woven of the twisted, triple strands[5] of Nature
richly patterned by varied moods and emotions.
Though diverse its tastes, all of mankind
sits at this one, single banquet, relishing the manifold delights
that the art of drama spreads before it.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ (*approaching*): My humble respects to Your Honour.

GAṆADĀSA: Be blessed with long life, my good girl !

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: The Queen sends me with this message, Your Honour, saying: "I trust that teaching Mālavikā is not too onerous a task, Sir."

GAṆADĀSA: Do assure Her Majesty, my good girl, that my pupil is both highly talented and quick to grasp the finer points of the art. Why expatiate on it at length ?

Whatever manner of presenting an emotion 5
I show her, instructing her, this young girl re-presents
improving on it, instructing me as it were,
showing me how much better it could be done.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ (*to herself*): Looks as if she surpasses even Irāvatī. (*aloud*) Accomplished indeed must the pupil be whom her teacher is so enthused about.

GAṆADĀSA: Let me ask you this, my good girl ; I ask because persons of this sort are rarely found. Tell me, where did the Queen discover so gifted a person?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: You see, Sir, the Queen has a brother named Vīrasena born of a mother of a caste lower. His Majesty has placed him in charge of the frontier fortress on the banks of the Narmada. Noticing that the girl possessed talents that could well benefit from training in the fine arts, he sent her as a gift to his sister.

GAṆADĀSA (*to himself*): Ah! That's how it is, is it? Her very bearing betokens that she is of no mean stock. (*aloud*) I am certain that she will bring me great renown , my pretty. You see:

The guru's sacred art imparted to a pupil 6
highly gifted gains extraordinary excellence;
even as a raindrop finding its home in a sea-shell
is transformed into a pearl of the finest water.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: And where might your pupil be right now, your Honour?

GAṆADĀSA: Standing at the lattice window that overlooks the lotus pool in the pleasure gardens, enjoying the refreshing breeze. Having taken her right through the arduous five-part dance sequence, I asked her to rest.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Well then, I crave Your Honour's permission to take leave, Sir; I shall meet her there. Letting her know of her guru's great satisfaction with the progress she has already made, I am sure I can increase her dedication to the study of dance.

GAṆADĀSA: You do that ; go and meet your friend. I'd better go home as well and rest. (*both exit*)

End of Interlude

Enter the king followed by the Chief Minister holding an official letter while the king's retinue stands to one side.

AGNIMITRA (*addressing the Chief Minister who had been reading the letter to himself*): So, Vāhatava, what is Vidarbha's lord planning now?

VĀHATAVA: His own ruin, my lord.

AGNIMITRA: Anyway, let us hear what he has written in his letter to us.

VĀHATAVA: His reply runs this way, my lord : he writes : "Your most Gracious Majesty has addressed us thus : 'Your uncle's son, Prince Mādhavasena was seized at the frontier by your commandant as he was on his way here to our court to finalize a matrimonial alliance with us, and taken prisoner. Out of due regard for us you ought to release him forthwith together with his wife and sister'. Surely it cannot be that you are unaware that this is the course of action followed by princes of the earth in their dealings with their kinsmen of equal status. Therefore in this matter it behoves Your Most Gracious Majesty to adopt a neutral stance. As for the prince's sister, she was lost in the confusion that followed the attack. We shall do our best to find her. As for the release of Mādhavasena himself, these are my terms and conditions to do so; let His Most Gracious Majesty make a note of it".

"If Your Most Gracious Majesty sets free 7
the Mauryan Minister, my brother-in-law,

now lying in your prison, then Mādhavasena
shall I at once set free in return."

AGNIMITRA (*furious*): What? Is this ill-advised fellow actually bandying words with us? Proposing a quid pro quo, is he? Eh? Vāhatava, listen to me. Vidarbha is our natural enemy. At present he is adopting an adversarial stance towards us. Despatch orders to General Vīrasena commanding our forces in the south. Let him carry out the punitive expedition already decided upon by us to exterminate this man who has dared to ally himself with our enemies.

VĀHATAVA: As my lord commands.

AGNIMITRA: Wait, what is your own view of the matter?

VĀHATAVA: My Lord, your decision is in accordance with the theories framed by political scientists. For:

An enemy newly installed as ruler, 8
and hence not firmly planted in his subjects' hearts
is weak, easily uprooted, like a tree
newly planted that has not taken firm root.

AGNIMITRA: Indeed the theories of political thinkers are incontrovertible. Making a pretext of Vidarbha's recent message to us, let the General prepare to take action.

VĀHATAVA: Very well. (*he exits*)

The king's attendants resume their allotted duties; the vidūṣaka enters.

VIDŪṢAKA: His Majesty had entrusted me with a mission. "Gautama", he confided, "I have seen Mālavikā only in a painting—and that too by chance. Think of some plan whereby I can see her in the flesh". I have devised such a plan. Let me advise His Majesty about it. (*turns*)

AGNIMITRA (*seeing the vidūṣaka*): Here we have my other minister, in charge of 'other affairs'.

GAUTAMA (*approaching the king*): May Your Honour prosper!

AGNIMITRA (*with a nod beckoning to him*): Come and sit here.

The vidūṣaka takes a seat.

AGNIMITRA: My friend, I trust that your eye of wisdom has perceived some means of fulfilling my wish – a sight of the desired object in person.

GAUTAMA: Enquire after the success of my plan.

AGNIMITRA: Meaning?

GAUTAMA (*whispering in the king's ear*): Like this.

AGNIMITRA: Well done, my good friend. A clever gambit for sure. Though it might not be easy to succeed in this enterprise, now I can at least hope.

Only with a helping hand can one however powerful 9
gain an object entangled in hindrances;
even a person with perfect sight
needs a lamp to see in pitch darkness.

A voice in the background.

Enough, enough of all this bragging: only in the presence of the king can this matter of which of us two is better than the other be decided.

AGNIMITRA (*listening*): My friend, a flower blossoms on the tree of your clever stratagem.

GAUTAMA: Ah! Well; you'll see the fruit as well in a short while.

Enter the chamberlain, Maudgalya.

MAUDGALYA: The Chief Minister begs to report my lord, that His Majesty's commands have been duly carried out. However, Haradatta and Gaṇadāsa are here:

Like the very embodiments of the two dramatic modes, 10
our two masters in the art of drama
stand here clamouring to see you, my lord,
each vying to claim victory over the other.

AGNIMITRA: Usher them in.

MAUDGALYA: As our lord commands. (*exits and returns with the two gurus*)

HARADATTA: Ah! How forbidding the aura of Royal Glory!

No stranger is he to me, nor unapproachable; 11
even so, as I draw near, I begin to tremble.
Like the surging ocean changing each moment,
though he is the very same, I still see him anew.

GAṆADĀSA: Luminous energy indeed, in human form! Therefore it is, that though:

I am granted free entry by the guard at the door 12
and escorted by the one close to the lion-throne;
yet, I stand, my way barred by his wordless splendour,
my glances stopped dead in their tracks
compelled to turn aside.

MAUDGALYA: There, is our lord; You might both approach him, gentlemen.

BOTH GURUS (*approaching*): Victory to our lord!

AGNIMITRA: Welcome, honoured gentlemen. (*glancing at an attendant*) Place seats for them.

BOTH GURUS (*drawing near*): May our lord be ever victorious!

AGNIMITRA: Why are the two of you, both instructors in the palace, presenting yourselves here at the time set apart for the instruction of pupils?

GAṆADĀSA: May our lord be pleased to hear what I have to say. I have received my instruction in the art from a venerable and celebrated teacher. I have experience as a teacher as well and been favoured with the patronage of my lord and Her Ladyship, the Queen.

AGNIMITRA: Yes, I am fully aware of all this. What is your point, Sir?

GAṆADĀSA: Despite such credentials, I have been insulted by this man Haradatta – and that too in the presence of prominent members of the Court. He jeered at me saying that I was not equal to the dust of his feet.

HARADATTA: On the contrary, my lord, it was he who made the first deprecatory comment – and he did it with some relish. "The difference between Your Honour and myself is like the difference between a puddle and the ocean," said he. Therefore, my lord, you be the judge between us. Test our knowledge of the theory of the art and our skill in its practice. With your expert knowledge only Your Honour can be the proper judge.

GAUTAMA: An excellent proposition.

GAṆADĀSA: An excellent idea. If only Your Majesty would examine us carefully ......

AGNIMITRA: Now, now, wait a minute. Her Ladyship, the Queen might well consider us partial. In the circumstances, it is only proper that this issue be decided in the presence of the Queen; and let the learned Kauśikī be also present.

GAUTAMA: A point well taken, my lord.

BOTH GURUS: Whatever His Majesty thinks is right.

AGNIMITRA: Well then, that is settled. Maudgalya, go, inform the Queen of this matter that has come up. Request Her Ladyship to attend us here, bringing the revered Lady Kauśikī with her.

MAUDGALYA: As my lord commands. (*exits ; then returns with the Queen and the ascetic lady, Kauśikī*) This way, my lady, this way.

QUEEN DHĀRIṆĪ (*addressing Kauśikī*): Your Reverence...about this flutter between these two gurus, Haradatta and Gaṇadāsa ....what do you think will be the outcome ?

KAUŚIKĪ: You have no cause to worry over a possible defeat of your protege. Gaṇadāsa is not going to be outdone by his rival here.

DHĀRIṆĪ: Even so, his rival has the advantage of royal favour, of the king; that could work against Gaṇadāsa.

KAUŚIKĪ: Dear lady! You too hold an august title – Queen-Consort, don't forget. Consider:

> Favoured by the Sun's gift of his own splendour[6], 13
> the Fire blazes with immeasurable brilliance.
> Equally, the Moon embraced by Night
> augments its own greatness.

GAUTAMA: May the gods protect us! For here comes the Queen with her companion the learned Kauśikī leading the way.

AGNIMITRA: Yes, I see her... Her Ladyship:

> Auspiciously dressed and adorned, 14
> accompanied by Kausiki
> in ascetic garb, shines our queen—
> the Triple Veda, Earth's Wisdom incarnate
> accompanied by Inner Wisdom
> that searches for the Spirit.

KAUŚIKĪ (*approaching the king*): May victory always attend upon our lord!

AGNIMITRA: My respectful salutations to you, revered lady.

KAUŚIKĪ:

> For a hundred autumns may you be 15
> husband and lord of the two Dhāriṇīs,[7]
> both bounteous, both of equal patience;
> one the support of the line,
> having brought forth progeny powerful,
> the other the support of all living beings,
> bearing harvests abundant from copious rainfall.

DHĀRIṆĪ: May my lord be ever victorious!

AGNIMITRA: Welcome to our queen. (*to the ascetic*) Lady, be seated.

Everyone is seated in their proper places.

AGNIMITRA: My Revered Lady Kauśikī, a quarrel has broken out between the two rival gurus, Haradatta and Gaṇadāsa over the matter of their relative expertise in the arts of the theatre. I would like you to be the judge and adjudicate between them, my revered lady.

KAUŚIKĪ (*smiling*): You are putting me on, surely, my lord. This is like living in the capital and having a priceless gem tested in a village, is it not ?

AGNIMITRA: No, no, it is not so. Your name itself is "learned Kauśikī". Further, both Her Ladyship, the Queen and myself might be considered interested parties given to partiality, I daresay .

BOTH GURUS: Our lord has spoken rightly. The revered lady here being neutral in this matter is therefore best fitted to be the judge of our merits and shortcomings.

AGNIMITRA: Well; why not let the disputation begin then ?

KAUŚIKĪ: My lord, the essence of the arts of the theatre lies in its stage presentation. What use are wordy discussions? But ... the Queen might think differently perhaps...?

DHĀRIṆĪ: If you ask me, the dispute itself between these two does not please me one little bit.

GAṆADĀSA: I trust the Queen does not really think it likely that I might lose at the hands of one who is no more than my equal in knowledge ... My lady... ?

GAUTAMA: Your Ladyship, let's now witness the battle of the two rams. What use paying them for doing nothing ?

DHĀRIṆĪ: You do love quarrels, don't you?

GAUTAMA: O, no; that's not so. But when two rutting elephants go for each other in right earnest, how can there be peace until one of them goes down?

AGNIMITRA: Surely the revered lady here has already seen the graceful persons of the two gurus in action on the stage and witnessed their fine miming, has she not ?

KAUŚIKĪ: Yes, I have; but what of that?

AGNIMITRA: What more proof can they provide of their mastery of the art ?

KAUŚIKĪ: Ah ! I was just coming to that,

A certain artiste excels as a performer, 16
another has the special powers of a teacher inspired;
he in whom both these powers combine, only he
deserves to be at the head of teachers of this art..

GAUTAMA: Did you two worthy gentlemen hear what the revered lady here said just now? The gist of it is that the judgement on your relative merits as instructors will depend on the practical demonstration of your instruction.

HARADATTA: That suits us well.

GAṆADĀSA: My lady ....so, it has come to this....

DHĀRIṆĪ: In that case, if a mediocre pupil incapable of profiting from the guru's instruction puts on a poor performance, is the guru to be blamed for it ?

AGNIMITRA: I am afraid so, my lady. An instructor's acceptance of a pupil of little or no talent exhibits weak judgement on his part.

DHĀRIṆĪ (*to herself*): What is to be done now ? However, there is to be no further encouragement of the infatuations of my lord, the king; enough is enough. (*aloud, to Gaṇadāsa*) : Better desist from these pointless attempts of yours.

GAUTAMA: The words of Her Ladyship, the Queen, make excellent sense. Listen Gaṇadāsa, why are you not simply content gorging yourself on the sweets offered to the Muse of the Arts, Sarasvatī, under the pretext of teaching dance and music. Instead, you go bothering with disputations, contests and what not, in which you might very easily come out the loser.

GAṆADĀSA: Even granting that this is the true import of the Queen's words, hear me out; for the occasion demands that I speak.

A man who shrinks in fear from a contest 17
confident that he has gained a foothold in his career,
and patiently bears a rival's whips of scorn;
to whom his art serves merely as the means
of eking out a livelihood , is spoken of
as a mere huckster putting his learning up for sale.

DHĀRIṆĪ: Your pupil has been only very recently initiated into the art and placed in your charge. It is ill-advised that instruction which has had so little time to be embedded should be put to the test.

GAṆADĀSA: That is precisely why I insist that it should be tested.

DHĀRIṆĪ: Very well; why don't the two of you show off your professional expertise to the revered lady here, just here, in private ?

KAUŚIKĪ: That is not advisable, my lady. A single judge however knowledgeable he might be, arriving at a decision unaided might come to an erroneous decision.

DHĀRIṆĪ (*to herself*): You foolish woman, do you think I am fast asleep when I am wide awake ? Trying to pull the wool over my eyes are you?

Turns away in exasperation; the king draws Kauśikī's attention to her.

KAUŚIKĪ:

How now, my lady with a face lovely as the moon! 18
Why without cause do you turn that face away
from my lord here ?
Wives, it is true, have great power over their husbands;
but they show their anger only with good reason.

GAUTAMA: O she has reason enough and a good one too. Her retainers need her protection. (*looking at Gaṇadāsa*) You are lucky indeed that under cover of anger, the Queen has come to your aid. Many might possess learning but all do not have the skill to impart it to another.

GAṆADĀSA: Listen to him, my lady. This is how the world would think too and therefore :

A dispute having arisen, if you , my lady 19
will not permit me, eager to show my proficiency
in imparting my art to my pupil, to present her,
I have to conclude that I have lost your favour.

Rises from his seat.

DHĀRIṆĪ (*to herself*): I am trapped! (*aloud*) As the guru, you have complete authority over your pupil.

GAṆADĀSA: I have laboured under a groundless misapprehension long enough. But now I have received Her Majesty's permission. I await my lord's commands. What sort of composition would His Majesty like me to present to exhibit my proficiency as instructor ?

AGNIMITRA: Whatever Her Reverence directs you to present .

KAUŚIKĪ: My Lady, the Queen, appears somewhat disturbed. I hesitate to offer any suggestion .

DHĀRIṆĪ: You may speak freely. Surely I can still exercise authority over my retainers.

AGNIMITRA: And over myself as well, you might say

DHĀRIṆĪ: Your Reverence, speak now.

KAUŚIKĪ: In the opinion of the experts, the calita dance based on a four-part composition is the most difficult to present. Let us therefore see one part of it, presented by both dancers in the contest, each one presenting the very same part, so that we shall be able to judge the difference in the teaching styles of the two gurus here.

BOTH GURUS: We shall observe the directions given by Her Reverence.

GAUTAMA: The two gurus had better leave now and make all the necessary arrangements in the theatre for the performance–the music for the accompaniment and so forth; and when all is ready, let them send a messenger to inform His Majesty. Or, the very sound of the drums would make us get up and wend our way to the theatre.

HARADATTA: Very well. (*he rises, while Gaṇadāsa looks towards the Queen expectantly*)

DHĀRIṆĪ: Go, be successful. I am not in the least averse to your success, you know.

Both gurus exit.

KAUŚIKĪ: This way, this way, honoured gurus.

BOTH GURUS (*turn around*): Here we are.

KAUŚIKĪ: I speak now as the presiding judge in the ensuing contest. See that both the performers enter the stage dressed in costumes that will show to the best advantage the beauty and elegance of all their limbs.

BOTH GURUS: We do not have to be told such things. (*both exit*)

DHĀRIṆĪ: If only my noble lord would bring to bear such resourcefulness to the management of affairs of the state how well it would redound to his credit!

AGNIMITRA:

Have you not misread enough what is happening, 20
high-minded lady! None of this, believe me, is my doing!
As a rule, persons of equal talent and accomplishment
tend to indulge in rivalry, competing for recognition.

Sounds of drums heard in the background; all listen intently.

KAUŚIKĪ: Ha ! Listen, the music has already commenced!

Tuned to the sonorous middle note of the scale 21
that fills peacocks with restless longings, the bass drum speaks
played upon to yield its rich and thrilling resonances.
Mistaking these for the deep rumblings of massed rainclouds,
peacocks stretching their necks up respond with impassioned calls.
Ah! How it maddens the hearts and minds of the hearers!

AGNIMITRA: My Lady! Let us proceed and be the audience.

DHĀRIṆĪ (*to herself*): Ha! How little regard does my noble lord show for the proprieties!

GAUTAMA (*aside to the king*): Listen, friend, softly; be cool and walk calmly, lest Her Ladyship, Queen Dhāriṇī change her mind and withdraw her consent.

AGNIMITRA (*aside to the vidūṣaka*):

Despite all my efforts to keep calm and collected 22
the pulsing passion of the beating drum hurries me on,
as if it were the sound of the chariot of my heart
coming down on the path of fulfillment.

All exit.

ACT TWO

When the stage is set for the dance recital, and the music ensemble is tuning up, the scene opens to present the king seated on a throne with Queen Dhāriṇī; the vidūṣaka, friend of the king is next to him; also the ascetic Kauśikī; their several retinues are disposed of according to rank.

AGNIMITRA (*to the ascetic lady*): Your Reverence, which of these two honoured gurus do you think should be instructed to make his presentation first ?

KAUŚIKĪ: In their knowledge of the art and in their accomplishment, both gurus are equally mature, but Gaṇadāsa being older in years should be given precedence.

AGNIMITRA: So be it; Maudgalya, go, advise the two gurus accordingly; and then you may resume your specific duties.

MAUDGALYA: As our great lord commands. (*exits*)

GAṆADĀSA (*entering*): My lord, Śarmiṣṭha's four-part dance-composition is set to be performed at a moderate tempo. Our lord should deign

to watch one specific part out of its four parts, with undivided attention.

AGNIMITRA: Out of respect for the composition and for the learned guru as well, I shall give it my concentrated attention. (*exit Gaṇadāsa*)

AGNIMITRA (*aside to the vidūṣaka*): Listen, dear friend:

My eyes yearning for a vision of her, 1
now in the greenroom, secluded, dart forward,
impatient, as if rashly resolved to seize and crumple up
these curtains that screen her from my view.

GAUTAMA (*aside to the king*): Look, look, the honey of your eyes is now on its way; but the fly is buzzing around.... so be circumspect while you feast your eyes on the honey.

Mālavikā now enters with her guru who carefully scrutinizes the elegance and beauty displayed in every part of her body.

GAUTAMA (*whispering*): Your Honour, you may now take a good look. The sweetness you see before you in no way belies the promise held out by the likeness, I believe.

AGNIMITRA (*whispering*): Ah! My friend :

I gazed on her likeness, my heart filling with misgivings; 2
for the beauty of it bore false witness, it seemed;
now seeing her, I think he failed who drew that likeness,
lacking the true artist's powers of concentration.

GAṆADĀSA (*looking at Mālavikā*): My dear child, shake off any stage fright that might seize you; and show the poise that comes so naturally to you.

AGNIMITRA (*contemplating Mālavikā, to himself*): Ah! Her form! How flawless in every part!

Those long eyes! That glow of the autumn moon in her face! 3
Those arms hanging gently down from her shoulders!
High breasts nestling snugly 'gainst each other
on a chest so spare and tautly-shaped that the sides
seem planed and smoothed down, polished to glisten!
Ah! That waist! Could it not be measured by the
grasp of one enfolding palm!
Those magnificent hips! Those feet with sweetly curving toes!
Her form it seems has been moulded to his dream
of the ideal dancer shaping itself in her teacher's mind!

Mālavikā after humming a few notes to tune her voice to the pitch of the instruments, sings the theme of the fourth quarter of the set piece selected for performance.

How hard to get is my beloved 4
O my heart, give up your love
for him ....
Ha! What might this mean ....
this faint throbbing ...
in the far corner of my left eye ....
Here he is , Ah! .. not seen for
so long ....
now, what steps should be taken ....
to bring him close to my side ....
Know this .. my lord ... Ha .....!
How I pine with love for you ....
subject am I to another's will!

After singing this love-lyric, Mālavikā dances, expressing its sentiments through movement and gesture .

GAUTAMA (*whispering to the king*): Did you hear that ? Using the words of this four-part composition composed for the dance, Her Ladyship here is in fact offering herself to you, is she not ?

AGNIMITRA (*aside*): My heart sends that very same message, my friend ... Can there be any doubt?

Constrained by Dhāriṇī's presence, 5
unaware of my own feelings for her,
not finding a way to disclose hers,
she chooses a maiden's tender plaint
addressed to her handsome young lover
to conceal and convey her love for me.
Having sung:
"Know this, my lord, that this poor girl
burns with passion for you:"
she danced, miming the words of the song,
pointing to various parts of her body;
I knew at once;
her plaint had me and me alone for its object.

Mālavikā prepares to leave at the end of her performance.

GAUTAMA: Just a moment, my lady; have you not forgotten something ? Let me advise you of it.

GAṆADĀSA: Stay, my child. You may leave the stage once the instruction that you have received has been judged to be flawless.

Mālavikā turns around and stands still, waiting.

AGNIMITRA (*to himself*): Amazing! How loveliness glows in splendour in all states and stances! Aha! Just see her :

One hand, her left, placed lightly on her hip, 6
the bracelet resting still at the wrist;
the other, like a vine's tender young berry-bearing branch
relaxed to hang down languid;
her eyes bent on the inlaid floor
as one big toe plays with flowers strewn on it;
the upper half of the body firmly drawn up, still,
appears far more enchanting than it appears
in movement as she dances!

DHĀRIṆĪ: So, you give serious consideration even to Gautama's words, Sir?

GAṆADĀSA: O, no, Your Royal Highness, it is not quite that. Often, Gautama's words do in fact show acute perception from his constant association with His Royal Highness, my lady.

Even the dull wits of the unschooled are cleared 7
by constant association with the learned,
just as turbid waters become limpid
from the cleansing touch of powdered paṅka nuts.

(*glancing at the vidūṣaka*) : So, my lady, let us hear what the gentleman here has to say.

GAUTAMA (*looking at Gaṇadāsa*): Why don't you first ask the judge for her opinion; after hearing that I'll point out the lapses in proper procedure that I noticed.

GAṆADĀSA: Revered lady, why don't you tell it as you saw it, good and bad alike.

KAUŚIKĪ: Everything was as perfect as could be; as I watched,

Her body spoke, eloquently articulating 8
the meanings enfolded in the words;
the placing of the feet followed strict rhythms;
total immersion in the essence of the sentiments
that blossomed in perfect delineation,

the delicate gestures and movements
faithfully following the music;
transitory moods flowed smoothly in linked sweetness,
each phasing into the next—no rough edges;
and one single, central emotion prevailed
dominant, unifying the presentation.

GAṆADĀSA: How does our lord find the presentation ?

AGNIMITRA: Ah! Gaṇadāsa, the high opinion we had of our protege, is no more; our great pride in him has grown cold.

GAṆADĀSA: Now, I have come out on top as a true guru in the art of dance.

As gold that does not turn dun tested by fire 9
in the presence of experts is deemed pure,
so is the instruction of a guru to his pupil
when it is judged flawless by conoisseurs of the art.

DHĀRIṆĪ: How fortunate for you. Sir, that you are honoured by the approval of the learned judges.

GAṆADĀSA: Her Majesty's favour is the sole source, indeed, of my good fortune. (*looking towards the vidūṣaka*) Gautama, now tell us what's on your mind.

GAUTAMA: On the happy occasion of a pupil's debut on stage, a Brahmana ought to be honoured. And that rite you have forgotten.

KAUŚIKĪ: Amazing is the insight displayed by our judge here in matters of dance presentation!

All laugh heartily while Mālavikā permits herself the hint of a smile.

AGNIMITRA (*to himself*): My eye has possessed itself of the quintessence of its desired object. For now :

It has looked upon the softly smiling face 10
of the girl with lovely, long, liquid eyes
lit up by the flash of sparkling teeth glimpsed
through slightly-parted lips;
a face like a lotus about to blossom,
its filaments, bright, barely-revealed.

GAṆADĀSA: O, mighty Brahmana! This is definitely not the first formal dance recital in full costume in this theatre. Otherwise, how could we possibly have omitted to offer the honour due to you who are so worthy of being honoured!

GAUTAMA: Oh, I see! Here I am, like some silly cātaka that hears the

thundering of dry, empty clouds in the skies and waits, eager to taste the raindrops.

KAUŚIKĪ: How very true!

GAUTAMA: In that case, the dull-witted have to be guided by the example of the learned who have expressed their satisfaction. Therefore, I shall give the young lady a token of my appreciation, since you have so highly commended her performance.

So saying, he draws a bracelet off the king's wrist.

DHĀRIṆĪ: You had better wait. How can you offer this ornament to her before you know what the merits of the other are ?

GAUTAMA: Why? Because it belongs to another

DHĀRIṆĪ (*looking towards Gaṇadāsa*): Worthy Gaṇadāsa, your pupil has demonstrated her proficiency, surely.

GAṆADĀSA: Come, my child; let us go now. (*Mālavikā exits with her guru*)

GAUTAMA (*looking at the king, whispers*): This is how far my wits can go in serving the interests of Your Honour.

AGNIMITRA (*whispering in reply*): Don't go setting limits to your resourcefulness.

Like the sunset of my eyes' great good fortune; 11
like the end of my heart's great festival;
like the door being shut firmly in the face
of my mind's steadfastness, was that fateful moment, I believe,
when she vanished from my sight,
disappearing behind those curtains.

GAUTAMA: O, great! You are like a sick pauper who wants the physician to bring the medicine to him.

Haradatta enters.

HARADATTA: Will you now do me the favour of viewing my presentation, my lord?

AGNIMITRA (*to himself*): Viewing? The time for viewing presentations is now over. (*putting on an air of great courtesy*) Yes, we are eagerly looking forward to it.

HARADATTA: I am highly favoured, my lord.

A voice off-stage .

A BARD: Victory, may victory attend our lord! The noon-hour is upon us, and so we see :

In the long, lotus pool, wild geese laze, 12
each one in the shadow of a lotus leaf,
their eyes resembling shut buds;
pigeons shun the sloping rooves of palaces
and mansions sparkling-white that shimmer
in the intense noonday heat;
peacocks, dazed, fly round whirling fountains
eager to drink the droplets of water scattering;
the sun who drives seven steeds shoots all his rays
straight down with their full power, blazing,
even as you blaze with kingly virtues.

GAUTAMA: May I be soused in sauce and pickled! It is already time for the Brahmana to have his lunch; and yours as well, my lord. Physicians hold that it is bad for one's health not to eat at the proper time. So, now, Haradatta, what do you say to that ?

HARADATTA: What can I say? In the circumstances my words would be pointless.

AGNIMITRA (*looking at Haradatta*): It does look as if we have to view your presentation another time. Meantime, you may go and enjoy your rest.

HARADATTA: As Your Majesty commands (*exits*)

DHĀRIṆĪ: Let my noble lord now attend to his midday rituals.

GAUTAMA: My lady, would you please make a special point of seeing that food and drink are served expeditiously?

KAUŚIKĪ (*rising*): My blessings for your wellbeing, noble sir.

Exits with the Queen and her retinue.

GAUTAMA: Listen, my friend, not only in beauty but in artistic accomplishments as well, Mālavikā is without a second; is that not so?

AGNIMITRA: My dear friend:

By yoking her skill in Art 13
to her artless loveliness,
the Creator fashioned Love's arrow,
and then dipped it in poison.

But why speak at great length? I shall simply say that you have to be concerned for my interests.

GAUTAMA: In the same breath, I say that you too have to show concern for my interests. Right now, my belly blazes inside me like a cooking

pot sizzling in an eatery.

AGNIMITRA: Similarly, you too had better exert yourself speedily on your friend's behalf.

GAUTAMA: I readily accept the undertaking. However, the Lady Mālavikā is like moonlight obstructed by a drift of clouds. Seeing her depends on another's will ..... And as for you, my friend, you are like a vulture circling over a slaughter-house greedy for raw flesh, but afraid to seize it. Therefore, I would appreciate it if you wait in patience and wait for success in the undertaking.

AGNIMITRA: My dear friend, how can I wait in patience; when:

My heart having retreated from all amorous interests 14
in the women of my entire harem,
this girl with fine eyes has become the sole abode
of my love and affections.

All exit

ACT THREE

Samāhitikā, personal maid to the ascetic, Lady Kauśikī, enters.

SAMĀHITIKĀ: I come at the express command of Her Reverence: "Samāhitikā, go, fetch me a citron from His Majesty's pleasure groves" she said. But for that, I have to first find Madhukarikā who is warden of these groves. (*turns, looks around*) Ah! there she is, gazing at yonder Aśoka tree that appears as if it were all molten gold pouring glowing out of the fire. I shall approach her.

The warden of the groves is seen standing.

SAMĀHITIKĀ (*walking towards her*): Hey there, my friend, Madhukarikā; are your duties in these pleasure groves going well?

MADHUKARIKĀ: O, Samāhitikā, it's you; welcome, my friend.

SAMĀHITIKĀ: Listen dear girl; I have come on an errand, commanded by my revered mistress who said to me: "Folks like us ought not to present themselves before Her Majesty empty-handed; therefore; I would like to pay my respects to the Queen with the gift of a citron."

MADHUKARIKĀ: There right before you are the citron trees. But first give me the news. Of the two dance gurus competing with each other to exhibit their skills as teachers, whom did the revered lady judge to

be the better teacher.

SAMĀHITIKĀ: Both gurus are well versed in the arts, as you know; both have expert knowledge of the texts and practice of the art; both equally accomplished performers as well. But, it was Gaṇadāsa who was finally judged superior as a teacher on account of the superb performance of his pupil Mālavikā.

MADHUKARIKĀ: Hmm...I see. Now tell me, what is all this gossip going around? About Mālavikā, you know.

SAMĀHITIKĀ: Indeed, there is not the least doubt that our lord is very much enamoured of her. And I daresay....it is only his deepest regard for the feelings of Queen Ḍhāriṇī that keeps him from exercising his royal prerogative. As for Mālavikā, these days she looks like a faded garland of jasmines. That is all I know; do not press me any further. Let me go.

MADHUKARIKĀ: Very well. Why don't you pick that citron hanging on the branch over there to take with you.

SAMĀHITIKĀ (*miming the plucking of a citron*): So....dear girl; in return may you obtain the happy fruit for this service rendered to a saintly personage.

Prepares to leave.

MADHUKARIKĀ: Wait; let us go together. I too have to see the Queen. For I have to inform Her Majesty that yonder Asoka glowing golden is tardy in blooming because it aches with the longings of pregnancy[8].

SAMĀHITIKĀ: Of course; it is your duty to do so.

They exit

End of Interlude

The king enters love stricken; he is accompanied by the vidūṣaka.

AGNIMITRA (*looking down at himself*) :

Denied the sweetness of the beloved's embrace 1
my body might well waste away;
deprived of even a fleeting glimpse of her,
my eyes might well brim over with burning tears;
but you, my heart, are never parted
from that doe-eyed girl !
You remain ever rapt in bliss perennial.
Yet you burn in intense anguish. Why?

GAUTAMA: No more of these lamentations, my lord... abandoning all fortitude. I have seen Bakulāvalikā, Her Ladyship Mālavikā's dear friend. I have spoken to her. Your message has been conveyed.

AGNIMITRA: O, really? And what did she say?

GAUTAMA: Inform our lord that I am most honoured indeed by being entrusted with such a mission. But that poor girl–and be sure to let him know this–is so carefully guarded by the Queen–like a treasure trove is watched over by a cobra–that it is by no means easy to get close to her. But, I'll see what I can do.

AGNIMITRA: O glorious lord! O, god born of desire! Having landed this person squarely in a very hotbed of obstacles, you now deliver a blow like this...so that this wretched person can barely brook a moment's further delay!

With an air of dismay and disbelief.

Such pain cruelly racking my poor heart! 2
So seemingly innocent your weapon!
Is there any correlation between the two?
What is spoken of as infinitely tender,
is in truth cruelly biting and sharp.
It is all part of your great game, O,Churner of Hearts.

GAUTAMA: Your Honour, I have been telling you that I have already devised a plan that will accomplish your purpose. Possess yourself in patience, Sir, please.

AGNIMITRA: My heart has turned away from all day-to-day interests, all customary activities. How in the world can I pass the rest of this day? Whatever remains of it?

GAUTAMA: That's easy enough, my lord. Even now, Queen Irāvatī sent her trusted, personal maid, Nipuṇikā, with a spray of red amaranths, you remember–the flower that is the first to appear–the herald of Spring? And with it a message under the pretext of welcoming Spring, which said: 'I long to ride the swing in the company of my dear lord'? And Your Honour promised her that you would. So let us make our way there to the pleasure groves.

AGNIMITRA: No, I cannot.

GAUTAMA: Why not?

AGNIMITRA: Ah! My dear friend; listen. Women are by nature pretty shrewd. Even as I am showering the tenderest caresses on her, do you really believe that Her Ladyship Irāvatī will not notice that my

heart is not in it? That it is somewhere else? Therefore I say:

Excuses can be found in plenty 3
to justify breaking of promises;
so better decline an invitation
though it might be right for the occasion
than court high-spirited women
with greater ardour than ever before—
and make love to them.
That surely is quite out of question.

GAUTAMA: On the other hand, Your Majesty.....to abandon the observance of these civilities that form the decorum of the Inner Apartments, all on a sudden as you are doing – that is surely conduct unworthy of Your Honour.

AGNIMITRA (*reflecting for a moment*): You have a point. Very well then; you'd better lead the way to the pleasure groves.

GAUTAMA: This way, this way, my lord (*they turn around*). Note this; do you see how the pleasure groves welcome you, sir, urging you to enter—waving you in ceremoniously with their tender shoot-fingers that flutter excitedly in the embrace of the brisk breeze.

AGNIMITRA: (*displaying signs of a pleasant touch*) : My dear friend, just observe the inborn nobility shown by the Genius of Springtime.

The melodious cooing of koels 4
honey drunk, seems the voice of Spring
enquiring with tender concern:
"how long can love's bitter anguish be borne?"
Drenched in the fragrance of mango flowers
the southern breeze glides softly o'er my limbs
as if it were passing a compassionate hand
over them to ease their aching.

GAUTAMA: Enter, my friend, and find some relief.

Both enter the pleasure grove.

GAUTAMA: Just look around you attentively, my good friend; the presiding divinity of the pleasure grove in all her beauty, eager to divert your mind has adorned herself with spring flowers that would put to shame the adornments of lovely young women.

AGNIMITRA: Yes, I see it all with wonder and admiration:

The brilliance of the scarlet Aśoka's blooms 5
surpasses the rich red of the lower lips
of young women, tinted by lākṣā juice.
Sprays of buds forming traceries in deep blue and russet
and sparkling white on amaranth bushes put in shade
ornamental patterns traced on their charming faces.
Shapes formed by honeybees glossy black as kohl
clinging to tilaka blossoms have left far behind
the fine art of shaping the tilaka on their foreheads.
It seems the goddess of springtime adorning herself
mocks with disdain the rites of adornment
practised by young women beautifying their faces.

Both the king and vidūṣaka mime the beauty of the pleasure groves.

Meantime, Mālavikā enters the grove, looking forlorn.

MĀLAVIKĀ: I feel ashamed that I am so deeply in love with our lord the king without having the slightest clue as to what his true feelings might be. How can I summon the courage to speak about this to my dear friends? How long will love force me to endure this intolerable burden of anguish for which there seems to be no remedy, I do not know. (*takes a few steps*) Where am I going? (*reflecting*) O, yes; I have been assigned a task by our lady, the Queen... "Mālavikā," she said, "As a result of Gautama's thoughtlessness, I fell off the swing hurting my feet; they are very painful. Therefore, go and perform the prescribed rites to relieve the longings of pregnancy of the Golden Asoka. If within five nights, the tree bursts into bloom, then....(heaves a deep sigh), I shall grant you your wish, whatever it is that you desire deep within your heart." So let me proceed to the appointed spot so as to be the first one to be there. Bakulāvalikā should be arriving presently, bearing the cosmetics and ornaments to adorn my foot. Meantime I shall lament my present fate without let or hindrance for a brief while. (*turns around*).

GAUTAMA (*sees Mālavikā*): Hee..hee..hee..what have we here! Sugar candy to counteract the inebriation caused by drinking too much hard liquor.

AGNIMITRA: What's that?

GAUTAMA: There. It's Mālavikā, not too far from us. Not too elaborately dressed, she is alone and appears restless with longing.

AGNIMITRA (*delightedly*): Really? Is Mālavikā here?

GAUTAMA: Undoubtedly she is.

AGNIMITRA: In that case, I can hold on to life a while longer :

Hearing from you that she, my love, is near, 6
my desolate heart full, breathes again, as a traveller's
who, desperate for water hears the sarus crane's shrill call,
and knows that a stream hidden by trees flows close by.

Where, O, where is Her Ladyship?

GAUTAMA: There, Your Honour; she is just emerging; there, from behind yonder line of trees; now, she is turning... headed this way, I'm sure.

AGNIMITRA (*looks; he is overjoyed*): Yes, yes, my dearest friend; I see her:

With those twin orbs of her hips, 7
swaying magnificent;
slender in the waist—
swelling breasts proudly rising, exultant—
Ah! Those eyes! Beautifully long, expansive:
here she comes, my very life.

But look, my friend; how different looks Her Ladyship, so changed from her former state; now I see:

Pale, pale cheeks, pale as the jointed stems of canes, 8
yet luminous—wearing few jewels—
a delicate jasmine vine
bearing a flower or two—
and all its leaves, alas! Spring has transformed
into a faded, droopy yellow.

GAUTAMA: She seems to be touched by the selfsame sickness as you yourself, my friend.

AGNIMITRA: It is a friend's affection that makes you see it that way.

MĀLAVIKĀ: This Aśoka, waiting expectantly to have her artless longings fulfilled, refrains from putting on her flower robes, remaining restless, filled with yearning like myself. Let me then sit on this stone seat delightfully cool from the thick shade of the tree, and try to divert my mind.

GAUTAMA: Did you hear that, your Honour? Her Ladyship mentioned just now that she was filled with longing.

AGNIMITRA: I am still not convinced that your conjecture is correct, my friend. Because:

The breeze that blows from the Malaya Mountains 9
wafting the fragrance of the amaranth's pollen,

and cooled by sprays of droplets of water
squirting from tender leaf-buds that it forces open,
often stirs vague, nameless longings.

Mālavikā sits down on the stone slab.

AGNIMITRA: Come here, my friend; come, let us conceal ourselves behind this tangle of vines.

GAUTAMA: I notice someone not too far away; Irāvatī, I believe.

AGNIMITRA: When a lordly elephant roaming at will chances upon a lovely lotus-pool, does it really care if crocodiles are lurking in its waters?

The king continues to contemplate Mālavikā.

MĀLAVIKĀ: Heart! O, my heart! Cease yearning for the unattainable. Let not your high-flying chariot of desires rise so far above this earth when there is no base to build your hopes upon. Why do you torment me like this?

The vidūṣaka looks meaningfully at the king

AGNIMITRA: Ah! My beloved! See how perverse love is!

The cause of your desire you do not reveal; 10
the true identity of its object I cannot guess;
yet, fair maiden with loveliest thighs,
I am the cause of these laments of yours, I think..

GAUTAMA: Pretty soon, you will be free of all doubts; for here comes Bakulāvalikā to whom I entrusted your message of love asking her to speak to Mālavikā in private.

AGNIMITRA: And will she remember my request?

GAUTAMA: Why not? Indeed! You really think this daughter of a slave will fail to remember a message as weighty as the one you sent, Sir? Why, even I would not forget it.

Bakulāvalikā now enters carrying the ornaments to adorn Mālavikā's feet for the dohada ceremony.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Is my dear friend well and happy?

MĀLAVIKĀ : Ah! It's you, Bakulāvalikā. Welcome dearest friend; come and sit down with me here.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ (*sitting down*): My sweet girl, you know Her Majesty, the Queen, has entrusted to you a task most befitting your true worth. So, now come, give me one of your feet that I might decorate it with lākṣā juice and place the Queen's own anklet on it.

MĀLAVIKĀ (*to herself*): O my heart, do not rejoice that a great piece of good fortune has come your way. But now, how on earth do I get out of the predicament I am in? On the other hand, why care; let it be; let this be my funeral adornment.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: What are you thinking about? You know how anxious the Queen is to see the Aśoka tree that glows like molten gold burst into a profusion of blossoms.

AGNIMITRA: Ah! I see now; so that's what it's all about; the performance of the rites to fulfill the Aśoka's fond longings so that it will bloom. Well, well.

GAUTAMA: As if you couldn't guess what all this is about! Did you think that my lady, the Queen, would have this girl adorned with her own ceremonial ornaments without good reason?

MĀLAVIKĀ: My friend; I ask your forgiveness for this act. (*so saying she stretches out one foot*)

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: O don't be silly! You are as dear to me as my own body. (*with these words, she goes through the motions of decorating Mālavikā's outstretched foot*)

AGNIMITRA:

> Do you see, my friend, the rich lines of lākṣā juice 11
> adorning the forepart of my beloved's foot?
> How like the first, tender shoots they appear,
> of Love's Tree that burned when Kāma was by
> Hara's glance burnt.

GAUTAMA: A duty truly worthy of it has been placed on Her Ladyship's foot, indeed.

AGNIMITRA: You couldn't be more right, my friend.

> The young girl does have the prerogative, 12
> of aiming a good kick at two objects with this foot of hers
> glowing soft rose-red like Spring's tender new leaf-buds,
> and lit up by the flashing brilliance of her toenails:
> this Aśoka that will not bloom
> until its deep longings are satisfied,
> and the lover standing before her
> with bowed head, sensible of fresh offence.

Enter Queen Irāvatī in a somewhat drunken state; she is attended by her principal maid and confidante, Nipuṇikā.

IRĀVATĪ: Hey! My girl, Nipuṇikā; I have so often heard it said that a state of intoxication in a woman lends her special charm. Tell me, is there any truth in this widely held opinion?

NIPUṆIKĀ: My lady, at first this was merely a popularly held opinion; but today it has been proved true.

IRĀVATĪ: Come, come; let's have no more of this piece of flattery. No doubt these sugary phrases are prompted by your affection for me. Tell me this; how did you come to know that my lord has already preceded me to the pavilion where the swing is set up?

NIPUṆIKĀ: By inference, My Lady. Considering His Majesty's absolute and unalterable love for you, it is easy to conclude this.

IRĀVATĪ: None of this flattery, I said. So speak as one who adopts an objective point of view, my girl.

NIPUṆIKĀ: The worthy Gautama, hankering after gifts usually made on the occasion of the coming of Spring gave me to understand this.

IRĀVATĪ (*weaving and stumbling from her drunken condition, turns around*): Ah! My dear girl, Nipuṇikā, my heart grown somewhat languid from being intoxicated tells me to hurry up and go and meet my lord; but my feet do not follow my heart's dictates.

NIPUṆIKĀ: Well, here we are, at the pavilion that houses the swing.

IRĀVATĪ: But.... Nipuṇikā.....my revered lord is not to be seen.

NIPUṆIKĀ: Look around this place with some care. Simply to tease you, my lady, our lord might have hidden himself somewhere. Let us go close to this stone slab under the Aśoka tree; there it is with the Priyaṅgu vine twining all around it. (*Irāvatī walks close to it*)

NIPUṆIKĀ (*turns round and looks carefully*): Look, look, my gracious lady, while we both look for the mango sprouts, the red ants are busy biting.

IRĀVATĪ: What on earth are you talking about?

NIPUṆIKĀ: Here in the shade of the Aśoka, is Bakulāvalikā, occupied in adorning Mālavikā's foot.

IRĀVATĪ (*with disbelief*): But.... this is not a place to which Mālavikā can possibly have access. What do you think is going on?

NIPUṆIKĀ: I think, that Her Majesty, the Queen, who had injured her foot badly by falling from the swing, has in fact appointed Mālavikā in her own place, to attend to the ceremony of quenching the Aśoka's longings. Otherwise, how could her Majesty permit a mere maid in

attendance to wear her own special pair of anklets.

IRĀVATĪ: Great indeed is the honour done to this girl !

NIPUṆIKĀ: But, my lady, why are we not looking for the king?

IRĀVATĪ: Because, my girl, my feet refuse to move from this place. And my mind grows restless with suspicion. Let me first check if there are grounds for such suspicion. (*she looks at Mālavikā carefully; then to herself*): O, yes, indeed.....grounds?...There's plenty of that. How my heart grows fearful, and with good reason too.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ (*pointing to Mālavikā's foot that she has decorated*): Well, dear girl, are you pleased with the patterns that I have drawn on your foot with lākṣā juice?

MĀLAVIKĀ: Seeing that it is my foot, my friend, I do feel embarrassed to praise your handiwork. But do tell me, who taught you this art ? The art of decorating with cosmetics so superbly?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: My dear girl, know that I am the pupil of an expert teacher, our lord, His Majesty the king.

GAUTAMA: Go on, hurry up, my friend, go and claim the due remuneration as her guru.

MĀLAVIKĀ: How nice that you have not grown conceited over your skill in this art, my friend.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Having finally found a pair of feet worthy of my instruction, I might grow quite conceited now. (*to herself*) Lucky for me that I have been able to carry out my mission as the royal messenger! (*looks carefully at the glowing colour on Mālavikā's foot*) I have finished decorating one of your feet, my friend. All that is left to do now, is to blow upon it. But why bother! This spot is breezy enough.

AGNIMITRA: Ah! my friend, look, just look:

> The rich lākṣā juice on her foot still glows wet— 13
> O! To dry it with my breath!
> A golden opportunity presents itself,
> to perform my very first act of service for her.

GAUTAMA: Why feel sorry for yourself? In due course you will have plenty of opportunities to do that.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: My friend, see how your foot glows like a many-petalled red lotus. May you always be close to our lord's embracing arms!

Irāvatī looks meaningfully at Nipuṇikā.

AGNIMITRA: This is my own fervent prayer as well.

MĀLAVIKĀ: Now listen to me, my friend, you utter words that really ought not to be spoken.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: I only speak what ought to be spoken.

MĀLAVIKĀ: Is that how dear I am to you, really?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Yes; but not only to me, my dear.

MĀLAVIKĀ: To whom else then?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: To our lord, who else, who appreciates fine qualities when he sees them.

MĀLAVIKĀ: Stop it. What you speak cannot be the truth. Such good fortune is not to be mine.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: It's you who doesn't know the truth. But it is clearly seen in the wasted frame of our lord and in the touch of paleness in his limbs.

NIPUṆIKĀ: Just listen to this wench; miserable creature. Her answers have the ring of having been prepared beforehand.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Better accept as authoritative the sayings of the good people of this world. Love is the best judge of love.

MĀLAVIKĀA: You keep babbling, speaking as your fancy leads you.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: O, no, not at all; these are not my words; they are the words of our lord, no less. His love it is that makes them sweet and tender. They are merely spoken through another's lips; mine.

MĀLAVIKĀ: Ah! My dear friend; when I think of the Queen ....my heart feels little comfort.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: You simpleton! Would you refrain from using the mango blossom, that very quintessence of Spring, as an ear ornament simply because you're afraid of the bees that are clinging to it?

MĀLAVIKĀ: But ... then, in case I get landed in deep trouble, will you be there for me, my friend?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Don't you know that I am the garland strung of Bakula blossoms; they breathe out fragrance when you crush them.

AGNIMITRA: Well said, Bakulāvalikā, neatly phrased.

> You rightly ascertained her true feelings; 14
> convincingly met all her objections as well;
> you spoke those words best suited to melt resistance;
> and induce acquiescence in her;
> O, how a lover's life hangs
> on the wit of the messenger he sends!

IRĀVATĪ: Did you mark that, my girl? Not only has Mālavikā's foot been got good and ready, she herself has been prepared well by Bakulāvalikā; isn't that so?

NIPUṆIKĀ: My royal lady, Bakulāvalikā's counsel would be effective in inducing longing where there is no longing to start with.

IRĀVATĪ: Rightly did my heart suspect something. Once I am in possession of the complete facts, then I shall ponder how best to deal with the situation.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Hey! Mālavikā, here, your other foot is also ready now; all decorated and ready. So, let me slip the anklets on both feet (*she puts on the anklets on Mālavikā's feet*) : Come on, my friend; now stand up; and carry out the Rite as commanded by Her Majesty the Queen to make the Aśoka bloom.

Both rise.

IRĀVATĪ: You hear that, girl, Nipuṇikā? It is the command of Her Majesty, the Queen, we hear. So be it.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Right before you, my friend there's one, flushing with rising colour, ready for enjoyment..........

MĀLAVIKĀ (*ecstatic*): My lord, is it?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ (*smiling*): No, not our lord; I meant this small spray of tender young leaves hanging from a branch of the Aśoka. Make an ear ornament of it for yourself.

GAUTAMA: Did you hear that, Sir?

AGNIMITRA: My dear friend, for even so little, one is so grateful.

The meeting of a pair of lovers, 15
one aching with passion and the other cool,
even if consummated holds no raptures for me.
Where both share equal love and passion,
even the body's annihilation
when hopes of fulfillment die, is far better.

Mālavikā having arranged the tender leaf spray in the shape of an ornament places it over her ear and then gracefully stretches her foot out to strike the Aśoka.

AGNIMITRA: Observe, my friend,

She takes from the Aśoka a tender leaf-spray, 16
an ornament for her ear;
and in return she offers it her foot;

a fair exchange of gifts it seems,
between tree and girl—of equal value :
but is it not I who stand here cheated ?

MĀLAVIKĀ: Will the expectations that prompted this service fulfill themselves, do you think?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Well, my dearest friend, if they do not it will be through no fault of yours. This tree would be worthless indeed, if after receiving such a favour as the touch of your foot remains slow in bursting into glorious flowering.

AGNIMITRA:

Highly-favoured as you are, O, Aśoka, 17
by the touch of the slim-waisted young beauty's foot,
delicate as a freshly-opened lotus blossom—
a foot whose movements keep the anklets conversing,
in continuing eloquence.
If you do not at once cover yourself, O, tree,
in a profusion of flowers, in vain
would those longings be
that you share with gallant young lovers.

My dear friend, I need some sort of a clue to cut into their private conversation.

GAUTAMA: Come along, Sir. I shall create an occasion to tease her.

The king and vidūṣaka enter.

NIPUṆIKĀ: Look, look, my royal mistress; our lord enters.

IRĀVATĪ: Ah! That! Did not my heart foretell at the outset that this would happen?

GAUTAMA (*approaching the two girls*): It is proper indeed, my lady, is it not, to kick with your left foot this dearly-cherished friend of His Majesty, the king!

BOTH GIRLS (*in surprised confusion*): O.......h! Our lord, the king!

GAUTAMA: Hey there! Bakulāvalikā—surely you who were aware of what this girl was up to should have known better and stopped her from committing such an ill-mannered act, eh......(*Mālavikā shows signs of being frightened*)

NIPUṆIKĀ: Did you note that, my royal lady....see what the worthy Gautama is leading up to now.

IRĀVATĪ: How else would this apology for a Brahmin manage to eke out his living?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Oh, good Sir, she is only following the command of Her Majesty, the Queen. She has committed no offence on her own; only because she is dependent on another has this happened. She should therefore be pardoned by our lord. (*Bakulāvalikā falls at the feet of the king, pulling Mālavikā down with her*)

AGNIMITRA: If that's the case, you are blameless, gracious lady; rise. (*the king takes Mālavikā's hand and raises her*).

GAUTAMA: Very properly done, indeed. The Queen's wishes ought to be duly honoured.

AGNIMITRA (*laughing*):

Ah! My charming girl with shapely thighs! 18
That left foot of yours, delicate as Spring's shoot,
fresh and tender, is not hurting now, is it,
after hitting hard this harsh tree trunk?

Mālavikā overcome with shyness, is embarrassed.

IRĀVATĪ (*scornfully*): Ha-ha-ha......! How delicate is my dear lord's heart! Soft as freshly-churned butter!

MĀLAVIKĀ: Come along, Bakulāvalikā: Come, let us inform the Queen that Her Majesty's command has been duly carried out.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: First you have to get His Majesty's permission to leave.

AGNIMITRA: You may leave by and by, gracious lady. But listen now to a request; the right moment to make it is here now.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Listen carefully, Mālavikā. May our lord be pleased to command her.

AGNIMITRA:

For a very long time, this poor suppliant 19
has not put forth that flower known as happiness.
Fulfill therefore his longings too, by a mere touch;
that itself is nectar; he craves for nothing else.

IRĀVATĪ (*bursting in*): Go on, fulfill it; fulfill it. The Aśoka might put forth blossoms; or it might not. But this one—it flowers and fruits, all at once!

There is general consternation.

AGNIMITRA (*aside to the vidūṣaka*): We are in trouble, my friend, advise me quickly. What's to be done now?

GAUTAMA: Depend on the strength and speed of our legs, I'm afraid. What else?

IRĀVATĪ: Well, well, Bakulāvalikā, you're doing pretty well, aren't you, my girl? And as for you, Mālavikā, why don't you go ahead and grant my husband his request?

BOTH GIRLS: Forgive us, gracious queen; who are we, two insignificant attendants in the Queen's retinue, to bid for the affections of His Majesty! (*both make a hurried exit*)

IRĀVATĪ: Alas! Alas! Men are not to be trusted. Trusting your deceitful words I came here like the naive deer charmed by the hunter's horn, quite unaware that I was being tricked and betrayed.

GAUTAMA (*whispering to the king*): For goodness'sake! Think of something to say to her in your defence. A burglar caught in the act should be able to swear that he was only practising drilling holes in the walls.

AGNIMITRA: My beautiful darling. Mālavikā is nothing to me. As you were late coming here, I was simply trying to amuse myself as best as I could.

IRĀVATĪ: Indeed. You are one to be trusted! I had not the faintest idea that my revered lord had found himself a plaything to amuse himself with. Otherwise, I who now have my fortunes at their lowest ebb, would not have intruded as I did.

GAUTAMA: My lady ought not to charge His Honour with showing a lack of considerateness towards Her Ladyship. If exchanging a few pleasantries with one of the Queen's retinue met quite accidentally becomes an offence, then Her Ladyship should perhaps clearly prescribe what is and what is not proper. (*Irāvatī prepares to leave in a fit of temper*)

AGNIMITRA (*going after her*): Calm down, my lady.

Irāvatī keeps walking with her feet tangled in her jewelled belt that had slipped down.

AGNIMITRA: My beautiful darling! Such utter disregard as you show toward me who loves you so dearly does not really become you, does it?

IRĀVATĪ: You deceiver, you! Faithless at heart!

AGNIMITRA:

You brand me a deceiver, my darling, 20
you brush me off with disrespect bred
by my loving familiarity with you;

you display that disdain I know only too well;
But now that even your ornamental belt
fallen at your feet beseeches you to forgive,
won't you give up pouring scorn on me,
my lovely beloved of tempestuous moods?

IRĀVATĪ: Even this miserable belt, its fortunes all dashed, this thing, it too seems to be taking your side; (*picks it up and brandishes it wishing to hit the king with it*)

AGNIMITRA: See, see my friend; Irāvatī here,

Flaming with anger, showering tears, raising aloft 21
the belt with little golden bells, carelessly fastened
that had slipped off those gorgeous orbs of her hips,
all set to hit me violently is she,
resembling a serried bank of rain clouds about to smite
the Vindhyas with glittering lightning flashes.

IRĀVATĪ: There you go again, provoking me to act improperly once more. (*with these words, she lets her arm drop*)

AGNIMITRA: (*trying to pacify Irāvatī*)

My darling with gorgeous curling hair! 22
Here I stand guilty having done you wrong.
Why withhold now this weapon raised to punish me ?
Even as you vent your anger on this sorry slave
your charms grow even more enchanting.

Would this be acceptable, I hope? (*with these words, the king falls at her feet*)

IRĀVATĪ: Ha! What a pity these are not Mālavikā's feet, whose touch you crave as the sole solace for your longings. (*she sweeps away attended by her maid Nipuṇikā*)

GAUTAMA: You may rise now, my friend. She has bestowed her favour upon you.

AGNIMITRA (*rising; not seeing Irāvatī*): Is this true? Has my darling really gone from here?

GAUTAMA: You may thank your lucky stars that she has definitely gone, still furious over the improprieties that you are guilty of. So, now let us also leave this place as fast as we can make it, while she is still in no mood to retrace her steps, like Mars retrograde.

AGNIMITRA: Strange are the ways of love; quite contrary; now, consider Irāvatī,

Seeing me prostrate before her she disregarded me; 23
yet, I regard this as an act of kindness she did me,
because my heart has been already ravished by my beloved.
Since she flounced off in a temper, unreconciled,
it is now possible for me to disregard
this queen of mine whose heart is full of love for me.

The king exits with his friend, the vidūṣaka.

ACT FOUR

Enter the king restless with longing, accompanied by a female guard of the Inner Apartments, Jayasenā.

AGNIMITRA (*to himself*):

She first came on the path of rumour within 1
range of my hearing;
Love's Tree, fed on Hope took firm root.
She then swept into the realm of my vision;
Love's Tree put forth a wealth of Passion's
new rose-red shoots.
At the touch of hands Love's Tree covered itself
in a profusion of buds; hair standing erect,
as thrills coursed along the limbs : may this Tree of Love
now make my languishing self taste its fruit.

(*aloud*) : Gautama! Hey, friend Gautama!

JAYASENĀ: Gracious Majesty, Gautama is not around.

AGNIMITRA (*to himself*): O, yes, I did send him to get news of Mālavikā.

GAUTAMA (*entering at this moment*): May prosperity attend you, Your Honour!

AGNIMITRA: Jayasenā, go, see where Queen Dhāriṇī is; and find out how Her Majesty is passing her time since her foot has been badly hurt and must be painful.

JAYASENĀ: As His Majesty commands. (*exits*)

AGNIMITRA: Now , my good friend, how is your young friend doing?

GAUTAMA: As well as a young koel in the grip of a cat, Sir.

AGNIMITRA (*Dejected*): And how's that?

GAUTAMA: Well, you see, Sir, the poor girl has been thrown into the treasure-chamber underground, as into the very jaws of Death itself by the tawny-eyed[9] lady.

AGNIMITRA: And why so? Because of my meeting with her?

GAUTAMA: Why else?

AGNIMITRA: Now, who has set his face against me so definitely as to incite such anger in my queen?

GAUTAMA: I'll tell you; listen. I was told by the ascetic lady, Kauśikī, that yesterday, Her Ladyship, Irāvatī, visited the Queen, to ask after her health and inquire if Her Majesty's injured and painful foot was getting any better.

AGNIMITRA: I see; And then what happened?

GAUTAMA: The Queen, I believe, said to Lady Irāvatī: "Has the beloved person been seen lately by our lord?" To which Lady Irāvatī seems to have responded sharply, saying: "Beloved person? Indeed, my lady, the polite expression you use, has no longer any meaning.....don't you know that 'belovedness' has now been transferred to one of the girls in your retinue?"

AGNIMITRA: I'm afraid that the way this piece of information was conveyed must have made our queen suspect that the reference was to Mālavikā, though no explicit mention was made of her.

GAUTAMA: Then; I gather, being pressed by Her Majesty for more information, Lady Irāvatī acquainted her with the full details of Your Honour's indiscretions.

AGNIMITRA: Aha! Alas! Her Ladyship Irāvatī does persist in nursing grievances, does she not? What followed then, tell me.

GAUTAMA: What followed, you ask. With their feet bound in chains, both Mālavikā and Bakulāvalikā, are at present enjoying their stay in the nether world, where the sun's rays do not enter – like two snake-maidens[10]

AGNIMITRA: O, misery! Misery! What a terrible situation!

The sweet-toned koel and the circling honey bee 2
found consorting with the newly-awakened mango tree
have been blown by an untimely thunderstorm
accompanied by slashing, adverse gales, into a deep dark hollow.

Ah! My friend! Whatever shall we do? Is there some way out of this predicament?

GAUTAMA: What do you think? How can there be? When Mādhavikā who is in charge of the underground treasure-chamber has been given this express command by Her Majesty : "On no account are you to set free these two miserable creatures – Mālavikā and Bakulāvalikā – unless my signet ring is presented to you."

AGNIMITRA (*sighing deeply, gently puts his arm around the vidūṣaka*): Ah! My dearest friend, whatever shall we do now?

GAUTAMA (*in deep thought*): I think I have it. There is a way out.

AGNIMITRA: Well? What is it?

GAUTAMA (*looks around carefully*): Someone may be around eaves-dropping; let me whisper my plan in your ear. (*draws close to the king and cups his hand around the latter's ear*) : This is how we do it (*whispers*).

AGNIMITRA (*in utter delight*): Good thinking; now go ahead and implement your plan successfully.

Jayasenā, the gaurd enters.

JAYASENĀ: My Lord, the Queen is lying down relaxing in the verandah lounge; red sandalwood unguent is being applied to her injured foot and Her Majesty is resting it on the palm of one of her attendants, while Her Reverence, the ascetic Lady Kauśikī is retailing interesting stories to amuse Her Majesty.

AGNIMITRA: The right time to visit my queen, wouldn't you say?

GAUTAMA: That's right, my lord, you had better do that. I too shall visit my lady, the queen presently, but not empty-handed.

AGNIMITRA: Better remember to speak to Jayasenā before you leave.

GAUTAMA: Right (*whispers to Jayasenā*) Lady, it's like this. (*he leaves*)

AGNIMITRA: Jayasenā, lead the way to the verandah lounge.

JAYASENĀ: This way, my lord, this way.

The Queen is seen reclining on a couch; Kauśikī is seated next to her; the queen's retinue is placed in order of rank.

DHĀRIṆĪ: How charming is the plot of this story, revered lady. What happens next?

KAUŚIKĪ (*glances around*): Let me continue with the narrative presently, my lady; for here comes His Majesty, the Lord of Vidiśā.

DHĀRIṆĪ: Oh! Here is my revered lord. (*she tries to rise from the couch to welcome the king with due respect*)

AGNIMITRA: O, no; please desist from such attempts; there is no need for all these formalities.

Do not add, my lady, to the pain gripping your foot 3
accustomed to resting on stools of burnished gold;
nor distress this foot further when already it feels
the unaccustomed separation from its anklet;
and do not fill me with pain, my beloved queen
whose voice ever sounds with murmurous sweetness.

DHĀRIṆĪ: May victory always attend my revered lord!

KAUŚIKĪ: May our lord be always victorious!

AGNIMITRA (*bowing to her sits down*): Is the agonizing pain in your foot a little more bearable, my queen?

DHĀRIṆĪ: Yes; there is a change for the better.

The vidūṣaka now enters, crazed with fear and holding his thumb tightly knotted with his sacred thread.

GAUTAMA: Help! Help! Save me, my lord; I have been bitten by a snake.

Every one looks dismayed, feeling distressed.

AGNIMITRA: O, how terrible! O, misery upon misery! Where on earth did you go roaming?

GAUTAMA: As I had planned on paying my respects to the Queen, I went into the pleasure garden for some flowers to offer Her Majesty the customary gift.

DHĀRIṆĪ: Alas! Alas! What cruel blow of Fate is this! That I myself should have become the cause of danger to the Brāhmaṇa's life!

GAUTAMA: There in the garden, as I stretched my right hand out to pluck a spray of Aśoka blossoms, I was bitten by Death itself in the shape of a venomous snake. See here? These two marks of its fangs?

KAUŚIKĪ: In such cases, the first thing to do is to perform an excision of the wound. Let this be done straightaway.

Excision of the wound, or its cauterization 4
or bloodletting at the precise spot of the bite;
those are the means to save the lives of persons if performed
immediately after they are bitten by venom-bearing creatures.

AGNIMITRA: At this point, now, this is a matter to be attended to by physicians who specialize in the treatment of venomous bites. Jayasenā, summon Dhruvasiddhi[a] immediately.

a. Literally, Sure-success

JAYASENĀ: As my lord commands. (*exits*)

GAUTAMA: O.......oh.....oho.....; o.....ho....oho.....I am in the grip of cruel Death.

AGNIMITRA: Don't be afraid, friend; sometimes bites are not venomous.

GAUTAMA: How can I not be afraid, my lord, when my limbs are shaking as if in a fit of convulsions? (*acts as if his limbs are being contorted by convulsions*)

DHĀRIṆĪ: Alas! Alas! The venomous snake is manifesting the power of its foul deed! Go to the Brāhmaṇa's help; hold him.

The attendants rush to support and help the vidūṣaka.

GAUTAMA (*looking piteously at the king*): Listen, Your Honour, I have been your dearest friend right from childhood. Remembering that, attend to the welfare of my old mother who will now be without a son.

AGNIMITRA: Courage, my friend; Do not give way to fear. Presently, the physician will treat you and restore you to health.

Jayasenā enters.

JAYASENĀ: My Lord, receiving the command of Your Majesty, Dhruvasiddhi respectfully says: "Let Gautama be brought right here to my surgery fast".

AGNIMITRA: Very well; Jayasenā, see that the eunuchs of the Inner Apartments carry him to the physician.

JAYASENĀ: As my lord commands. I shall do so, my lord.

GAUTAMA (*looking at the Queen*): Gracious lady, I may live, or I may not. But, be pleased my lady, to forgive me for any wrong that I have done to Your Majesty in the course of serving my master, the king.

DHĀRIṆĪ: Enjoy a long life!

Exit the vidūṣaka with the guard, Jayasenā.

AGNIMITRA: The poor fellow is timid by nature. He has no confidence even in the healing skills of Dhruvasiddhi who is aptly named.

Enter Jayasenā.

JAYASENĀ: Victory to my lord! Dhruvasiddhi begs to say that for performing the Rite of the Water-Pitcher some object with the figure of a snake on it has to be placed in the water and magical words spoken over it. So, let some such object be looked for and found.

DHĀRIṆĪ: Here; here is my serpent-seal ring. When he has completed the rites, bring it back and give it to me. (*she takes off her seal ring and gives it*)

The guard, Jayasenā receives the ring from the Queen and leaves.

AGNIMITRA: Jayasenā, as soon as the matter is successfully accomplished bring word of it to us at once.

JAYASENĀ: As our lord commands.

KAUŚIKĪ: My heart tells me that even as we speak now, Gautama has been cured of the effects of the poisonous bite.

AGNIMITRA: May it turn out as you say.

Enter Jayasenā.

JAYASENĀ: Victory to our lord. The effect of the poison having been neutralized, Gautama was in a few moments restored to his normal self.

DHĀRIṆĪ: The gods be praised! I am free from blame.

JAYASENĀ: Besides, this message from Minister Vāhataka says: "There are many matters of state that need to be discussed. Therefore, I request an immediate audience with His Majesty."

DHĀRIṆĪ: Let my revered lord leave now to attend to the business of the state and accomplish it successfully.

AGNIMITRA: This place is now exposed to the sun's heat. Coolness is highly recommended to accelerate the healing of Her Majesty's foot. So let her couch be moved to a shadier spot.

DHĀRIṆĪ: Girls, do as our revered lord instructs.

ATTENDANTS: We obey.

Exit the Queen and her retinue, and the ascetic lady.

AGNIMITRA: Jayasenā, now lead us by the secret path to the pleasure garden.

JAYASENĀ: This way, my lord, this way.

AGNIMITRA: Jayasenā, has Gautama completed what he was supposed to do?

JAYASENĀ: Certainly, my lord.

AGNIMITRA:

> Knowing full well that the stratagem devised 5
> to gain me my much-desired object,
> is doubtless bound to lead to success,
> my heart assailed by doubts is still full of fears.

GAUTAMA (*entering*): Congratulations, Your Honour. All the arrangements intended for your happiness have been successfully concluded.

AGNIMITRA: Go, Jayasenā, attend to your regular duties.

JAYASENĀ: As my lord commands. (*exits*)

AGNIMITRA: Now.....my good friend, that girl, Mādhavikā, is as you know, a real surly creature. She must have hesitated, a little, didn't she? A bit reluctant to accede to your demand ?

GAUTAMA: Having been shown the Queen's seal-ring, Sir, how could she have hesitated?

AGNIMITRA: I am not talking of the ring or the seeing of it. What I am saying is that the girl should have asked why these two girls whom she had strict orders to chain and place in custody were being suddenly released. And also why you of all persons were chosen to be entrusted with this task to the exclusion of the Queen's trusted, personal attendants. Surely, Mādhavikā ought to have asked these questions of you.

GAUTAMA: Sure she did; she pounded me with such questions, my friend. But slow-witted though I might be, my wit found ready answers.

AGNIMITRA: Tell me.

GAUTAMA: I said to Mādhavikā: "His Majesty was informed by the court astrologers that his natal star was presently in conjunction with malefic planets; and to ward off the evil influences, all prisoners ought to be released".

AGNIMITRA (*laughing delightedly*): And then?

GAUTAMA: Then, I added: "Her Majesty having heard of this, ordered me to deliver the message to make it look as if the decision to release the two girls was that of His Majesty; and that it was done this way only to spare the feelings of Her Ladyship Irāvatī." Mādhavikā listened and then saying: "It seems quite all right," acceded to my request.

AGNIMITRA (*embracing the vidūṣaka*): My friend, your affection for me runs deep.

> Not by use of sharp wits alone can the means 6
> to secure a friend's fond interests be found.
> The subtle path to success in a venture
> only the keen eye of deep affection discerns.

GAUTAMA: You had better hurry, Sir; having escorted Mālavikā with her friend to the summer-pavilion-on-the-lake and left them, I hastened to meet Your Honour here.

AGNIMITRA: Let me go and make her welcome. You walk ahead.

GAUTAMA: Better follow quickly. (*turning around*) Here we are in the

summer-pavilion-on-the-lake.

AGNIMITRA (*feeling apprehensive*): Look, my friend: do you see who is here–Lady Irāvatī's maid, Candrikā, approaching, her hands full gathering flowers. We'd better hide behind this wall.

GAUTAMA: Ah! Candrikā–Miss Moonlight herself is around. Moonlight should be avoided by burglars and lovers alike, they say. How true!

Both hide themselves behind the wall.

AGNIMITRA: Gautama, I wonder how your friend passes her time while waiting for me. Come, let us take a look through this window, shall we?

GAUTAMA: Let's do that. (*both stand at the window and look in*)

The scene presents Mālavikā and Bakulāvalikā.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Come on, dear friend, bow to your lord.

AGNIMITRA: I guess she is showing Mālavikā a portrait of myself.

MĀLAVIKĀ (*overcome with joy*): I bow to you. (*looking towards the door*) Where? Where is my lord? (*disappointed*) You, my friend, have played a trick on me.

AGNIMITRA: Look, friend Gautama; how delightful to see joy and dejection, both playing on Her Ladyship's face!

In one single moment changing from one to the other, 7
this lovely girl's face puts on both faces
displayed by the white lotus that at sunrise
blooms with joy and droops dejected at sundown.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Why? Here is our lord – in this portrait.

BOTH GIRLS: May victory attend on our lord.

MĀLAVIKĀ: You know, my friend, the other day when I stood face to face with my lord, I was not fully satisfied viewing his handsome appearance, as I am today. I have now contemplated to my heart's content the perfection of his beauty as his portrait presents it.

GAUTAMA: Did you hear that, Sir? What the lady means is that you do not look so good in person as you do in your portrait. Consequently, that you wear the pride of youth to no purpose, like the casket that contains a heap of gem-studded ornaments.

AGNIMITRA: That is not it, my good friend.

Women are ever eager to gaze upon and study with care 8
the appearance of the beloved in its entirety;

yet, at the very first meeting,
these lovely women with large, lustrous eyes
will not look straight at the beloved,
letting their level glances rest fully on him.

MĀLAVIKĀ: My good friend, see here – this lady with her face turned slightly aside on whom our lord's tender gaze is riveted — who is she? Tell me.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: O, this; this is Irāvatī standing beside our lord.

MĀLAVIKĀ: My dear friend, it does strike me though that our lord, paying so much attention gazing on one and one alone, ignoring all his other queens, is not being quite gallant and considerate.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ (*to herself*): Seeing her lord simply looking out of a painting, she is in truth imagining that he is the real king; and she shows her jealousy. Well, let me just tease her a bit. (*aloud*) This my dear girl, is the king's favourite, do you know?

MĀLAVIKĀ: O, really! Why then should I go to so much trouble .... I wonder .... all to no purpose, it seems.

AGNIMITRA: Look, my good friend;

The eyebrows knitting into a frown that breaks 9
the form of the beauty mark placed between them,
the lower lip quivering, petulant,
she turns her face away from the painting.
This lovely girl is in truth playing
a woman piqued by her beloved's peccadillos.

MĀLAVIKĀ: I suppose the worthy Gautama is also right here waiting to serve him. (*turning her face in another direction, she wishes to leave*)

BAKULĀVALIKĀ (*stopping her*): You are not really angry now, are you?

MĀLAVIKĀ: If you believe that I have for a long time remained angry, I shall recall my anger, here and now, if you like.

AGNIMITRA (*coming forward*) :

Tell me, my love with eyes lovely as blue lotuses! 10
How can you be angry with me for an act
merely represented in a painting?
When here I stand before your very eyes,
your slave devoted to you alone
and indifferent to all other women.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Victory to our Lord!

MĀLAVIKĀ (*to herself*): Amazing! Have I been feeling angry all along with just the picture of my lord! (*blushing with shame she greets the king with folded hands*)

The king stands indecisively.

GAUTAMA: Why, my friend, you seem rather aloof.

AGNIMITRA: I feel diffident where your young friend is concerned.

GAUTAMA: Why so? You mean that you do not feel sure of her, is that it?

AGNIMITRA: Listen:

In dreams she is there standing in the path of my vision, 11
only to vanish in a matter of seconds!
In secret she slips into my encircling arms,
then suddenly she's not there any more!
How can my heart with anguish aching from the illusion
of unions like this feel secure about her, my friend!

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Now listen, to me, my friend. Many a time has our lord been betrayed. It is time now that you show yourself worthy of his trust.

MĀLAVIKĀ: Ah! My dear friend. What of me? Ill-starred that I am, union with my lord even in a dream is unattainable for me!

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Our lord should give an answer to this.

AGNIMITRA:

An answer? What answer can I give her? 12
My own self have I already given
to your friend, before a solemn witness—
the holy fire of the five-arrowed god.
Myself not her master to be served;
her servant to serve her in secret.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: We are favoured.

GAUTAMA (*walking around speaks hastily*): Bakulāvalikā! Look, here is a gazelle busy nibbling the tender shoots of this Aśoka sapling; let us drive it away.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Very well; let us do that. (*starts to move*)

AGNIMITRA: My faithful friend! Now, at this moment when we require our privacy to be securely guarded, you ought to keep your eyes and ears open for intruders.

GAUTAMA: Does Gautama need to be instructed in this manner?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ (*walking about*): Good Gautama, I shall remain concealed in some dark corner in the shade. You had better guard the door.

GAUTAMA: That is fine; let's do so. (*Bakulāvalikā leaves*)

GAUTAMA: Here is a seat all of crystal; let me sit on it and relax. (*sits down*) Ah! How delightfully cool is the feel of this crystal seat. (*he promptly falls asleep*)

Mālavikā stands perturbed, even in some alarm

AGNIMITRA:

Give up your fear of union, my beautiful girl; 13
I have waited long enough to enjoy your love.
I am the fragrant mango tree; be you the clinging
Atimukta vine tenderly enfolding it.

MĀLAVIKĀ: I dare not do what my heart prompts me to, for fear of the Queen.

AGNIMITRA: My darling, you do not have to fear anything.

MĀLAVIKĀ (*with a deprecating smile*): No? Indeed not! Have I not witnessed the courage shown by my lord who does not have to fear anyone, displaying his courage when faced with the fury of the younger queen!

AGNIMITRA: Oh! That!

My love whose lips are like ripe bimba berries! 14
Know that gallantry is simply another name
for princes of the Bimbaka clan. Yet, this my life
hangs solely on the hope of having you, my long-eyed beauty!

This wretched person has been passionately enamoured of you for ever so long. Grant him your favour (*the king embraces her tightly*).

Mālavikā mimes her attempts to ward off his advances.

AGNIMITRA (*to himself*) : How very charming indeed are the responses of nubile maidens just stepping into the world of sexual awareness!

Trembling, she restrains my hand whose fingers, 15
fretting with desire
are fumbling impatiently to unclasp her girdle.
Held fast in a close embrace, she shields her breasts
with both her hands.
As I raise her face with those enchanting eyes
fringed by thick curving lashes, to kiss her, she turns her face
just a little sideways to throw a sidelong glance.

Under such pretexts does my beloved grant me the pleasure of complete fulfillment of my deepest yearnings.

Enter Irāvatī with her trusted maid, Nipuṇikā.

IRĀVATĪ: Listen, my girl. Nipuṇikā, did the girl, Candrikā, truly inform you that she saw the worthy Gautama alone on the pavement surrounding the summer-pavilion-on-the-lake?

NIPUṆIKĀ: My lady, how could I dare tell you something that's not true!

IRĀVATĪ: Well, let's go there then. My lord's dearest friend and companion was recently in serious danger and escaped with his life. We should check and see how he is doing; and ask after his health.........and........

NIPUṆIKĀ: Your observation, my lady, seems to be incomplete......?

IRĀVATĪ: Yes, what I meant to say was; "and also honour my lord's portrait in the summer-pavilion-on-the-waters".... and in this manner offer my apologies to him.

NIPUṆIKĀ: But why not do these honours to our lord, the king, in his person, my lady?

IRĀVATĪ: O, you silly girl; can't you see that my husband's heart now being with another, he is no different from his likeness in the portrait? This, my girl, is simply an exercise to salve my own conscience—for having stepped over the bounds of propriety in my recent behaviour to my husband.

NIPUṆIKĀ: This way, my lady, this way. (*they turn around*)

Enter one of the maids in the Queen's retinue.

MAID: Victory to Your Highness! Her Majesty, the Queen sends this message: "This is no time for me to indulge in feelings of jealousy. I ordered Mālavikā and her friend to be put in fetters and confined only in order to enhance your dignity and the respect you command. If you are agreeable to pleasing our revered lord, I would like to do so now. Let me know what your wish is."

IRĀVATĪ: Nāgarikā, say this to Her Majesty: "Who am I to tell Her Majesty what to do? Her Majesty has bestowed on me her gracious favour by putting two of her own personal attendants in fetters. By whose favour if not Her Majesty's can this person, that is, myself, prosper?"

NĀGARIKĀ: I shall convey the message. (*leaves*)

NIPUṆIKĀ: (*turning around, notices the sleeping vidūṣaka*) Look, my noble lady, come and take a look. Here we have the worthy Gautama sleeping sitting up at the doorway to the summer-pavilion-on-the-lake,

like a bull[11] in the market square.

IRĀVATĪ: O, dear; what a disaster! I hope no residual effects from the snake venom still remains to affect his health.

NIPUṆIKĀ: The appearance of his face is serene and healthful. There is nothing to suggest that he suffers from the after effects of the poison. Further, no less a physician than Dhruvasiddhi treated him.

GAUTAMA (*talking in his sleep*): ...Lady Mālavikā.....

NIPUṆIKĀ: Did you hear that, my noble lady. Who has fathered this miserable rogue, I wonder. All the time he fills his belly with sweets that he receives from us on the occasion of rituals and ceremonies where he is expected to pronounce his Brahminic benedictions. And at the end of if all, we hear him call on Mālavikā!

GAUTAMA: May you find greater favour than Irāvatī herself.....

NIPUṆIKĀ: This, my noble lady, is the real disaster, if there is one. Hiding behind this pillar, let me frighten this apology for a Brahmin with the crooked piece of wood lying here, that looks like a snake..... this fellow is terrified of snakes.

IRĀVATĪ: Ungrateful rogue that he is, he fully deserves to have some misfortune hit him unexpectedly.

Nipuṇikā throws the knotted piece of wood at the vidūṣaka.

GAUTAMA: (*suddenly waking up, startled*) Help me! O, my wretched fate! Alas! My dearest friend, a snake...a snake has leapt on me.....

AGNIMITRA: (*hastily coming out*) My friend, don't be afraid; don't be afraid.

MĀLAVIKĀ: (*coming behind the king*) My revered lord! Don't rush out so precipitately; he mentioned a snake.

IRĀVATĪ: Oh! No! What miserable luck! My husband himself is running towards us.

GAUTAMA: (*laughing heartily*) Oho! What's this? A mere piece of wood?.....So......it seems that I'm reaping the fruit of my action....a trick for a trick, is it? For making a couple of sharp marks on myself with ketakī thorns to make them look like snake bites!......

Enter Bakulāvalikā with a toss of the curtain.

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: My lord, my lord, don't come this way; there seems to be a snake around moving with crooked gait.[12]

IRĀVATĪ (*coming from behind the pillar towards the king*): Has the loving couple's daytime tryst gone smoothly and been successful? Without any impediments to the perfect fulfillment of their hearts' desires?

Everyone is confounded by Irāvatī's sudden appearance.

AGNIMITRA: My darling, what a strange way of greeting me?

IRĀVATĪ: Ah! Bakulāvalikā! How lucky for you! You have accomplished your mission as go-between most admirably!

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: My noble lady, pardon. Do not be angry; look kindly on me. Because the frogs are croaking, the glorious lord Indra does not forget the earth.[13]

GAUTAMA: Now, now, do not speak like this, madam. The mere seeing of you has caused His Honour here to forget your repudiation of his humble prostration at your feet. But still, my lady, even now you do not choose to be gracious towards him.

IRĀVATĪ: O, well; I might be angry still; but what good is that to me?

AGNIMITRA: To be angry without good reason is not part of your disposition; I say this with good reason:

Has there been a time ever, my lovely lady, 16
when anger showed visibly in your face
without good reason even for a single moment ?
And now tell me, my darling, how except at its brightest
does the moon's disc, the face of the brilliant night,
seized in Rāhu's malefic grip, become eclipsed!

IRĀVATĪ: "Without good reason" How well put by my husband! Now that my good fortune has passed to another, would I not become a figure of fun if I were to get angry once again?

AGNIMITRA: You misinterpret what I said, my darling. As for me, I see no real grounds for anger.

On a festive occasion, 17
though guilty of transgression
servants ought not to be bound
and confined; prompted by this feeling
I had these captives released.
They are here grateful to fall at my feet.

IRĀVATĪ: Nipuṇikā, go, tell her Majesty, the Queen; "My lady, now I see how much you favour me."

NIPUṆIKĀ: Yes, my lady. (*exits*)

GAUTAMA (*to himself*): O, darn it ! Yet another piece of bad luck! Escaping from her cage the pet pigeon has fallen right into the clutches of a kite.

Enter Nipuṇikā.

NIPUṆIKĀ (*aside*): My noble lady, by chance I ran into Mādhavikā and she informed me that this is how it all happened. (*whispers in Irāvatī's ear*)

IRĀVATĪ (*To herself*): Yes, I see, it all fits. There is no doubt that this is one of the schemes that this knave, Gautama, an apology for a Brahmin is clever at concocting. (*looking at the vidūṣaka*). So....this is the policy framed by the Minister of Amorous Affairs, I see.

GAUTAMA: Lady, if I have studied one little phrase that could be called 'policy'[14] may I forget even the Gāyatrī mantra.

AGNIMITRA (*To himself*): Now, how can I manage to extricate myself from this tangle of difficulties?

Enter Jayasenā.

JAYASENĀ (*Flustered*): My lord, O, my lord, the little princess Vasulakṣmi was chasing after her ball...and the monkey, Piṅgala put her into such a fright....terrified she is lying on the Queen's lap trembling like a leaf shaken by a blustery wind. She will not come out of the state of shock.

AGNIMITRA: Yet another disaster! Childhood is so vulnerable a state ...prey to timidity!

IRĀVATĪ: (*In great consternation*) Let my noble husband hurry to the child's side and calm her down.

AGNIMITRA: I'll soon restore her to consciousness. (*hurries out*)

GAUTAMA: Well done, well done, my friend, monkey Piṅgala! You have come to the aid of your friends in the nick of time; you have saved them from total disaster. (*exit the king with his friend the vidūṣaka; and Irāvatī with Nipuṇikā*)

MĀLAVIKĀ: Listen, friend Bakulāvalikā, when I think of Her Majesty the Queen, my heart trembles with fear. I wonder what is in store for me.

A voice behind the scenes.

A marvel! A marvel! Before five nights had done the rounds following the Rite satisfying the longings of the golden Aśoka, the tree stands covered in a profusion of buds! I have to let the Queen know immediately. (*Bakulāvalikā and Mālavikā are filled with joy hearing this*).

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Take comfort, my dearest friend. Her Majesty the Queen is true to her word.

MĀLAVIKĀ: Well then, let us follow the warden of the pleasure groves, shall we?

BAKULĀVALIKĀ: Yes, let's do that.

(*both exit*)

ACT FIVE

Enter Madhukarikā, the keeper in charge of the palace gardens.

MADHUKARIKĀ: The auspicious rites honouring the Golden Aśoka have been duly performed. I have had an ornamental dais raised at its base and a rich canopy stretched over it. Now I had better advise Her Majesty, the Queen that the duties she entrusted to me have been carried out. (*takes a few steps*) And Mālavikā....O, I hope fate looks kindly on her...The Queen was furious with her no doubt. But now that news of the glorious blossoming of the Golden Asoká has been brought to her, Her Majesty might take pity on the unhappy girl...Where might her Majesty be at present, I wonder. (*glancing around*) Ah! There is one of Her Majesty's retainers. It is Sārasaka, the hunchback.....emerging out of that courtyard over there and coming this way.... carrying a casket neatly wrapped in silk and sealed with the Queen's seal. Surely he should know where Her Majesty is. I'll ask him.

Enter the hunchback as described.

MADHUKARIKĀ (*walking towards him*): Hey there! Sārasaka, where are you hurrying off to?

SĀRASAKA (*stops*): Ah! It's you, Madhukarikā. I'm on my way to see the venerable high priest, to place this casket in his hands. As you might know, munificent gifts are now bestowed daily on learned Brāhmaṇas; scholars who have made a profound study of vedic texts....crossed over to the farthest shores of vedic scholarship, you might say.

MADHUKARIKĀ: Is that so? For what reason?

SĀRASAKA: Ever since Her Majesty came to know that her young son, the Crown Prince Vasumitra was entrusted by his grandfather, General Puṣyamitra, with the dangerous mission of guarding the "sacred horse"[15] that wanders at will for a whole year, she has been daily bestowing eighteen, large gold coins on every learned Brāhmaṇa who deserves such largesse.....to ensure the safety and long life of the prince.

MADHUKARIKĀ: A worthy thought. Now tell me where Her Majesty is and how she is occupied.

SĀRASAKA: Her Majesty, Madhukarikā, is at present seated in the palace-shrine listening to her scribe reading out to her a letter from her brother General Virasena, commanding the imperial forces in the Narmada Marches.

MADHUKARIKĀ: Ah! What news of Vidarbha's lord do we have?

SĀRASAKA: It is reported that the Lord of the Vidarbhas has been defeated by our lord's victorious army led by General Vīrasena and the commanders under him. Prince Mādhavasena, the defeated king's cousin has been released from captivity. And hear this; an embassy from the prince has arrived bearing rich gifts: wagon loads of jewels and treasures; fine mounts, horses and elephants, chariots, palanquins. A train of attendants mostly young women accomplished in the arts accompany these gifts. The leader of the embassy is seeking an audience with our lord for tomorrow, I hear.

MADHUKARIKĀ: Good news indeed. Well, you'd better be on your way, Sārasaka and do your errand. I shall attend to mine. (*both exit*)

End of Interlude

Enter the guard Jayasenā in charge of the Queen's apartments.

JAYASENĀ: I have been commanded by Her Majesty, the Queen, at present busy with the various rites honouring the Golden Aśoka to convey a message from her to our lord, the king. Her Majesty said: "Convey this message from me to my revered lord. Tell His Majesty that I greatly desire to admire and enjoy the blossoming glory of the Golden Asoka in his august company". I shall await here for His Majesty who is at the moment presiding in the Hall of Justice. (*she turns around*).

Bards are heard in the background hailing the king.

FIRST BARD: Glory, glory to our lord. What great good fortune it is that our lord solely by the employment of military power has set his foot firmly on the heads of our enemies:

By Vidiśā's banks in royal gardens and groves 1
resonant with the melodious cooing of koels,
you pass the hours of springtime in a transport of delight,
as if you were Love himself, bodiless, embodied,
and rapt in love for Rati, his goddess-consort Delight,

while on distant banks where Varadā[16], Bestower-of-Boons
flows, trees deeply-wounded by chains – tying posts
for your victorious war-elephants tugging –
bend down in lowly submission along with the foe
before the might of your armies, O, Bestower-of-Boons.

SECOND BARD:

Once, Kṛṣṇa, Śūra's great scion, clasped Rukmiṇī, 2
Princess of Vidarbha in his powerful arms
strong as iron bolts that secure great city-gates,
and carried her off by force in his swift chariot.
And now you, my lord, with the might of your arms
have ravished the Royal Glory of Vidarbha's lord.
Such daring deeds done by heroes both
in the land of the Kratha-kaiśikas[17]
are celebrated in song, O, god-like hero
by bards inspired by a passion for the heroic,
filling Vidarbha's lands from end to end.

JAYASENĀ: These praise-chants are a sign that our lord has risen from the judgement-seat and is coming this way. I had better move aside and stand under the arch of this front terrace so as not to come face to face with His Majesty. (*moves to the side*)

Enter the king with his friend, the vidūṣaka.

AGNIMITRA:

Yearning for my beloved, knowing full well 3
that union with her is not within easy reach;
hearing at the same moment that the might of my arms
has brought Vidarbha's lord to his knees,
my heart aches with despair;
yet, it tastes happiness—
a lotus burning in Summer's sun struck
suddenly by a shower of fresh raindrops.

GAUTAMA: As I see it, Your Honour, unimaginable happiness will soon be yours.

AGNIMITRA: What makes you say that?

GAUTAMA: Why, just this morning, the Queen spoke to the learned Kauśikī, saying: "My revered lady, since you pride yourself on your skill in the arts of decorating and adorning women, why don't you let us see a display of that skill on Mālavikā's person? Deck her out in the

customary wedding clothes and decorations of the Vidarbha country." And, Lady Kauśikī did precisely that – she dressed and adorned Mālavikā gorgeously. Perhaps the Queen intends to fulfill Your Honour's desires.

AGNIMITRA: Well, that is certainly possible, my friend, judging from Dhāriṇī's previous actions in similar situations. She has always gone along with my wishes without a trace of jealousy.

JAYASENĀ (*approaching the king*): Victory attend our lord. Her Majesty sends me with this message: "May the undertaking that I launched be crowned with success by contemplating the beauty of the blossoming Golden Aśoka in my revered lord's company."

AGNIMITRA: So the Queen is already there, is she, Jayasenā?

JAYASENĀ: Yes, my lord, she is. After bestowing the appropriate gifts on the ladies of the Inner Apartments according to their status and making them happy, Her Majesty gave them leave to depart. Now attended by her retinue headed by Mālavikā, Her Majesty awaits your arrival, my lord.

AGNIMITRA (*overcome with joy glances at the vidūṣaka*): Lead the way, Jayasenā.

JAYASENĀ: This way, great lord, this way. (*all turn around*)

GAUTAMA (*looking around carefully*): My friend, it appears that Spring is somehow past its prime here in the pleasure gardens.

AGNIMITRA: Yes indeed; it does seem that way now that you draw my attention to it.

> Here before us Kurabaka blossoms lie strewn on the ground; 4
> the sahakari[18] mango trees have their branches bending low
> laden with clusters of ripening fruit;
> the mellowing season now draws to its close.
> Ah! How the heart is restless, my friend.
> Nostalgic memories come flooding in creating restlessness!

GAUTAMA (*takes a few steps*): Just look at that Golden Aśoka, dear friend; how gorgeous it looks dressed in its finest robes of flower-sprays!

AGNIMITRA: Now I see that this tree had good reason to be slow to bloom. There it stands wearing a splendour quite extraordinary. You see, my friend:

> The wealth of buds put forth by all other Aśoka trees, 5
> heralding Spring's glory to come

has passed, I fancy, to this one single tree
now freed of the cravings of pregnancy
it was labouring under all this time
unable to burst into bloom.

GAUTAMA: Now my friend, relax; be confident about the future; for there is Queen Dhāriṇī with Mālavikā by her side, even though we're close by.

The king and the Vidūṣaka walk towards the Queen and her retinue.

AGNIMITRA (*looking at the group under the blossoming tree, is transported with joy*) : Ah! Look, my friend:

My queen over there rises and comes forward 6
to welcome me with all due honour;
my beloved, by her side, deferential; a picture
of the goddess, Earth, Bearer of Riches, it seems,
attended by Royal Glory, a Lakṣmī
who has forgotten to hold a lotus in her hand.[19]

MĀLAVIKĀ (*to herself*) : I know well why I am dressed in this festive attire. Yet...my heart trembles like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. But.... at the same time I feel a repeated throbbing in my left eye.

GAUTAMA (*aside*) : My dear friend, how exquisitely dressed Her Ladyship Mālavikā is and made-up as a bride.

AGNIMITRA : O, yes, I see her:

Wearing a silken garment that does not trail 7
and a few choice jewels, she is like a vision
of a brilliant caitra night lit by a few stars
as the moon is about to rise in mist-free skies.

DHĀRIṆĪ (*approaching*): May victory always attend on my lord!

GAUTAMA: May our gracious lady always prosper!

KAUŚIKĪ: May our lord always be victorious!

AGNIMITRA: My greetings to you, revered lady!

KAUŚIKĪ: May your cherished wishes be fulfilled!

DHĀRIṆĪ (*smiling*): We have tried to make this Aśoka tree a bower for trysts for my noble lord to meet and enjoy the company of young women.

GAUTAMA: Favours are being showered on you, aren't they, my friend?

AGNIMITRA (*walks around the Aśoka, embarrassed*):

It is not that this Aśoka is not deserving 8
of honours the queen chooses to offer it;
for did it not treat with fine disdain
the command of the Goddess of Vernal Beauty
and commend the Queen's efforts by bursting into bloom,
honouring her with the gift of flowers?

GAUTAMA : Come, come, my friend, relax and freely contemplate her beauty in the bloom of youth.......

DHĀRIṆĪ: Whose?

GAUTAMA: The Golden Aśoka's blossoming splendour, my lady.

Everyone sits down.

AGNIMITRA (*gazing at Mālavikā*): Alas! Such unbearable grief! So near......yet so far!

The cakravāka am I. 9
His companion my beloved here;
Dhāriṇī the envious Night
keeps us apart.

The chamberlain enters.

MAUDGALYA: Victory to our great lord! Your Majesty, the Prime Minister sends this message: "Two of the ladies highly accomplished in the arts who were part of the retinue accompanying the gifts from Vidarbha could not be presented to His Majesty with the others because they were worn out by the travails of the long journey. They are rested now and fit to appear before His Majesty. What are His Majesty's commands"?

AGNIMITRA: Bring them in.

The chamberlain exits and returns presently with the two girls.

MAUDGALYA: This way ladies, this way please.

FIRST GIRL (*aside*): Listen Madanikā, is it not strange that though I am a stranger in this palace entering it for the first time, my heart feels light; happiness wells from its depths.

SECOND GIRL: O, yes, Jyotsnikā, I feel that as well. You are of course familiar with the saying: "What the feeling heart tells turns out all right; it foretells both sorrow and joy".

MADANIKĀ: Let's hope that saying proves true in this case.

MAUDGALYA: Ladies, here is His Majesty seated with his Queen; you may approach.

The girls come forward. Noticing them Mālavikā and Kauśikī exchange glances.

BOTH GIRLS (*prostrating themselves before Their Majesties*): Victory to the king! Victory to the queen!

AGNIMITRA: Be seated.

Both girls seat themselves.

AGNIMITRA: In which particular arts are you ladies proficient?

BOTH GIRLS: We are proficient in music, great lord.

AGNIMITRA (*turns to the queen*): My lady, why don't you take one of these girls under your wing?

DHĀRIṆĪ: Mālavikā, take a look and choose whichever of the two you would like to have as a companion in your music studies.

Both girls take one look at Mālavikā and burst out in amazement.

GIRLS: Aha! It is the princess. (*prostrate themselves*) Homage to the princess!

The girls weep with Mālavikā while everyone watches in amazement.

AGNIMITRA: Who are you two ladies? And who is she?

GIRLS: Great Lord! She is our sovereign's young daughter.

AGNIMITRA: What? How can this be?

GIRLS: Great Lord! Listen to what we have to tell you. When the victorious armies of Your Majesty defeated the Lord of the Vidarbhas, they released Prince Mādhavasena from his captivity. This lady is his younger sister; her name is Mālavikā.

DHĀRIṆĪ: The daughter of a king? Have I then defiled precious sandalwood using it to make sandals for my feet?

AGNIMITRA: How is it that Her Ladyship has been brought to such a pitiable state?

MĀLAVIKĀ (*sighs deeply and speaks to herself*): By the decree of Fate.

RAJANIKĀ: Listen to what we have to say, great lord. When our prince, Mādhavasena fell into the hands of his cousin, his Prime Minister, the noble Sumati carried away the princess in secret, leaving her attendants like us behind .

AGNIMITRA: We know this already. What happened after that?

GIRLS: Your Majesty, this is all we know. We have no clue to what happened after this.

KAUŚIKĪ: What happened after this, I, most unfortunate woman that I am, can tell.

GIRLS (*surprised*): Princess, that sounds like Lady Kauśikī's voice, does it not?

MĀLAVIKĀ: Whose else but hers ?

GIRLS: Dressed as she is in the garb of an ascetic we could hardly recognise her. Revered lady we bow to you.

KAUŚIKĪ: My blessings on you both.

AGNIMITRA: Are these ladies your kinsfolk?

KAUŚIKĪ: Yes they are.

GAUTAMA: Please tell us the rest of Her Ladyship's story.

KAUŚIKĪ (*griefstricken*): I shall; listen carefully. Sumati, Mādhavasena's Prime Minister was my elder brother.

AGNIMITRA: We understand; now tell us what actually happened.

KAUŚIKĪ: Finding her brother, Prince Mādhavasena in dire circumstances, my brother took Mālavikā and myself and escaped; we joined a caravan headed for Vidiśā hoping for an alliance with Your Majesty.

AGNIMITRA: Then what followed?

KAUŚIKĪ: That caravan of merchants having covered the greater part of the way to Vidiśā by late evening, exhausted by the travails of the journey entered a forest to set up camp for the night and rest.

AGNIMITRA: And then?

KAUŚIKĪ:

> There appeared a band of fierce foresters 10
> armed with bows, quivers bound firmly
> and secured by straps crossed over their chests;
> wearing head-dresses of peacock feathers
> whose long plumes trailed down to their heels.
> Yelling they fell upon us from all sides;
> the sounds were like wild thunder-claps;
> so terrible was the onslaught that we were powerless to resist.

Recollecting the incident, Mālavikā trembles in terror.

GAUTAMA: You have no cause to be frightened, my lady. The revered lady, Kauśikī is narrating events long past.

AGNIMITRA: What followed then?

KAUŚIKĪ: For a while the warriors guarding the caravan held their own against the marauding foresters. But alas, they were soon overpowered and put to flight by these bandits.

AGNIMITRA: Ah! Revered lady, what followed must indeed be too, too painful to hear.

KAUŚIKĪ: Alas, it is. Then that noble brother of mine,

> Determined to protect the princess trembling 11
> fearful of violation at ruffian hands,
> and out of devotion to his dear departed sovereign
> paid with his own dear life the debt he owed his lord.

JYOTSNIKĀ: Aha-ha-ha! Alas! Sumati is then dead!

RAJANIKĀ: Which is why our princess has fallen into this state of abject misery.

Kauśikī weeps bitterly.

AGNIMITRA: Such is the course of life's journey for mortals on this earth, revered lady. You should not lament the fate of your noble brother. By this commendable act he made his allegiance to his lord yield its rich fruit. So, tell us what happened next.

KAUŚIKĪ: At that moment I lost consciousness; when I came to, the princess was nowhere to be seen.

AGNIMITRA: What a terrible experience you have had to go through, revered lady!

KAUŚIKĪ: Having committed my brother's body to the flames and at that hour experiencing once again the bitter grief I had endured when I suffered widowhood, I decided to travel to your kingdom. On reaching here, my lord, I put on these saffron robes that you see me in.

AGNIMITRA: A proper decision; it is the way of life that the pious adopt. And then what happened?

KAUŚIKĪ: I saw the princess again only after I myself had gained admission into the Queen's palace; she had been carried off by the foresters and found by Vīrasena who sent her to the queen. And that is the end of my story.

MĀLAVIKĀ (*to herself*): I wonder what my lord will say now.

AGNIMITRA: Alas! How indignity upon indignity is heaped on those struck by misfortune!

> This poor girl who deserves no less 12
> than the exalted title of 'queen'
> was reduced to being a serving-girl
> at everyone's beck and call;

like a piece of woven silk used as a scrap of cloth,
fit only to wrap round oneself during an oil bath.

DHĀRIṆĪ: Revered lady, it was highly improper on your part to have kept Mālavikā's royal parentage a secret all this time.

KAUŚIKĪ: Perish the thought that I was guilty of an act of impropriety! I had good reasons for keeping her true identity a secret for the time being.

DHĀRIṆĪ: And what may these good reasons be, may I ask?

AGNIMITRA: If you are free to disclose your reasons, do so now.

KAUŚIKĪ: I shall. Listen to them. Once when her father was still alive, a holy man walking in a procession accompanying a deity carried ceremonially from place to place in pomp and splendour saw the princess. He was a seer with special powers; whatever he prophesied always came true. And in my presence he had this to say about her future: "One whole year has to pass for this girl in servitude; only then will she obtain a husband worthy of her." When I saw that this period of servitude at your feet, my lady, had begun for her, I knew that the prophecy was fulfilling itself. I therefore felt that it should take its own course. I kept silent waiting for the right moment to speak. I believe that I have acted properly.

AGNIMITRA: Yes, you were right to wait in patience for the proper time to speak up.

The chamberlain enters.

MAUDGALYA: My lord, here is a message from the Prime Minister which could not be delivered earlier to His Majesty because another important matter had come up in the meantime. The Prime Minister says this: "We have come to a decision relating to the Vidarbha-problem. But we would like to have the benefit of His Majesty's considered opinion on this matter before proceeding further."

AGNIMITRA: Maudgalya, inform our Prime minister that we wish to establish a dual monarchy in the Vidarbhas. Both the brothers, Their Lordships, Yajñasena and Mādhavasena shall be rulers.

Both princes shall rule, each sovereign but separate, 13
holding sway on Varadā's banks, north and south,
even as the hot-rayed Sun and the cool-rayed Moon rule
dividing Time between them into Day and Night.

MAUDGALYA: My lord, I shall straightaway inform the Council of Ministers of His Majesty's decision.

The king dismisses the chamberlain with a flick of his fingers; the chamberlain leaves.

JYOTSNIKĀ (*aside to Mālavikā*): Princess, it is a matter of great happiness that the prince will enjoy sovereignty over half the kingdom.

MĀLAVIKĀ: It is a matter of greater happiness that the prince, my brother, is no longer in danger of his life.

The chamberlain returns.

MAUDGALYA : Glory to our lord! May it please His Majesty to hear this message from the Prime Minister; he says: "His Majesty's decision is an excellent one. The council of ministers after their deliberations had arrived at the same decision."

"With Royal Glory equally shared 14
in the kingdom partitioned, the two princes
shall bear the yoke of sovereignty, my lord ,
under your benign direction, in peace,
without fractious contention,
like two chariot horses controlled by the charioteer".

AGNIMITRA: Maudgalya, inform the Council of Ministers that written orders to that effect be despatched at once to our Commander-in-Chief, Vīrasena.

MAUDGALYA: As his Majesty commands (*he leaves; and returns a little later with a letter and a gift*)

MAUDGALYA: His Majesty's commands have been carried out. And right here is a letter just arrived along with a consecrated gift-offering from our lord, the Supreme Commander, Emperor Puṣyamitra. Will His Majesty be pleased to look at it?

The king rises immediately and with utmost reverence accepts the letter and the gift, places the gift first on his head and then hands it to an attendant; he unwraps the letter to read it.

DHĀRIṆĪ (*to herself*): Ah! How my heart leaps towards that letter. After the customary news about the wellbeing of my revered father-in-law, the letter must contain some news of my son, Vasumitra. A heavy burden of responsibility was placed by the General on my young son.

AGNIMITRA (*sits down and begins to read the letter aloud*):

"Blessings : The Supreme Commander, Puṣyamitra at present in retreat in the sacred enclosure, embraces with deep affection his son Agnimitra of long life stationed at Vidiśā, and presents these facts to

keep him fully informed. Having been consecrated as the sacrificer in the Rite of the Rājasūya, I appointed Vasumitra attended by a hundred princes as the guardian of the sacred stallion; and then released the stallion untrammelled to roam free as he willed, to be brought back at the completion of a year. While he was roaming in the meadows on the southern bank of the Sindhu, this stallion was seized and carried away by a troop of Greek cavalry. A fierce battle ensued between the two armed forces....."

The Queen appears desolated.

AGNIMITRA (*anxious, surprised*): How could this have happened? (*continues to read the letter*)

"Vasumitra, valiant bowman, defeating 15
the intruding foe pursued them, to rescue
my prince of stallions being carried off by force,
and safely brought him back to me".

DHĀRIṆĪ: Hearing this my heart breathes again freely.

AGNIMITRA (*reads out the rest of the letter*): "And now that my sacred horse has been brought back by my grandson as Sagara's was by his grandson Aṁśumat, I am ready to commence the Sacrifice. Therefore, ridding your mind of all resentment, Your Honour ought to come here without any delay accompanied by our honoured daughter-in-law to participate fully in the rituals of the sacrifice." I am highly honoured.

KAUŚIKĪ: Fortunate is the couple whose greatness is enhanced by the victory of a son. (*turning to the Queen*)

Placed firmly by your lord at the head 16
of those celebrated as the wives of heroes,
you have now been honoured by your
son with the title,
'Foremost among the mothers of heroes'.

GAUTAMA: My royal lady, it gives me immeasurable joy to see the son take after the father.

AGNIMITRA: Maudgalya, the young tusker has indeed followed in the footsteps of the leader of the herd[a].

MAUDGALYA:

Even with such fiery valour 17
bursting forth blazing, this young prince

---

a. Refers to Puṣyamitra

does not kindle awed wonder in our minds;
for you are his lofty source, invincible, my lord,
as the thigh-born sage,[20] of the subterranean Fire
that drinks up the waters of the Ocean.

AGNIMITRA: Well, Maudgalya, now go, see that all prisoners be freed straightaway, first and foremost the brother-in-law of Prince Yajñasena.

MAUDGALYA: As His Majesty commands. (*exits*)

DHĀRIṆĪ: Here, Jayasenā; go to the palace and convey the happy news of my son's victory to Queen Irāvatī and the other ladies of the Inner Apartments.

JAYASENĀ: I go at once, Your Majesty. (*she is about to leave*)

DHĀRIṆĪ: Wait a moment, come here.

JAYASENĀ (*stops and returns*) : Here I am, Your Majesty.

DHĀRIṆĪ (*aside*): Jayasenā, remind Her Ladyship, Irāvatī on my behalf of the promise I gave to Mālavikā when I appointed her in my place to do the honours to the Golden Aśoka to make it bloom. Acquaint Her Ladyship as well with the discovery of Mālavikā's true parentage. And entreat her for me in these terms: "You should not in any way whatsoever cause me to swerve from the path of Truth."

JAYASENĀ: Your Majesty's commands will be carried out forthwith.

Jayasenā leaves; she returns after a while.

JAYASENĀ: Your Gracious Majesty, here I am, looking like a veritable casket of jewels; jewels presented by the ladies of the Inner Apartments, each one expressing her unreserved happiness on the occasion of the prince's victory.

DHĀRIṆĪ: Good! But is there any reason to be surprised at their response? The glory of the prince's victory is as much theirs as it is mine.

JAYASENĀ (*aside*): Your Majesty. I conveyed the message to Her Ladyship Irāvatī; she begs to say this in response: "The promise already made by the Queen Consort is entirely in keeping with Her Ladyship's majesty and power; it cannot be contravened under any circumstances."

DHĀRIṆĪ: Revered lady Kauśikī, with your approval I would like to give Mālavikā in marriage to my revered lord as originally decided upon by your noble brother, Sumati.

KAUŚIKĪ: Even now, you have full authority over Mālavikā.

DHĀRIṆĪ (*takes Mālavikā by the hand*): Let my revered lord accept this as

the most appropriate gift to express my appreciation of the happy news brought to me.

The king remains silent and embarrassed.

DHĀRIṆĪ (*with a smile*): Surely my revered lord cannot intend to refuse my gift, does he?

GAUTAMA: My lady, it is a general observation that a new bridegroom is overcome by embarrassment.

The king throws a meaningful glance at the vidūṣaka.

GAUTAMA: Or, perhaps, His Majesty would accept the gift of the bride after she is honoured with the title of queen by Her Majesty.

DHĀRIṆĪ: By her royal birth she is entitled to the title of queen. Is it really necessary to say it in so many words?

KAUŚIKĪ: No, no, that is not the point.

Most gracious and beautiful lady! 18
The rarest gem born from the richest mine
is not worthy of being set in fine gold
while it yet remains unadorned.

DHĀRIṆĪ: Ah! Pardon me, revered lady. Caught up in the happy news of my son's victory I have overlooked the proprieties. Jayasenā, go quickly and bring me a veil of fine woven silk.

JAYASENĀ: Yes, Your Majesty. (*she leaves at once and returns with a fine silken veil of the kind princesses wore*)

DHĀRIṆĪ (*draping it over Mālavikā*): Let my revered lord be pleased to accept her.

AGNIMITRA: My queen, your commands leave me powerless to reply.

KAUŚIKĪ: Ah! Great joy! She has been accepted!

GAUTAMA: Ha! The graciousness of the queen is boundless!

Queen Dhāriṇī looks meaningfully at her retinue of attendants; they take the hint and approach Mālavikā.

ATTENDANTS: Homage to the queen!

Queen Dhāriṇī looks towards Kauśikī to see what her response is.

KAUŚIKĪ: Your conduct comes as no surprise to me, my lady.

Noble ladies honour their husbands, serving them 19
even at the cost of raising rivals for themselves;
rivers flowing towards the ocean
carry hundreds of streams along with them.

Irāvatī's maid Nipuṇikā enters.

NIPUṆIKĀ: Victory to our lord! Queen Irāvatī pays her respects and sends this message to His Majesty: "By stepping over the limits of propriety it is true that I gravely offended my lord, behaving with discourtesy and disregarding his wishes. Now that my lord enjoys the complete fulfilment of his cherished desires, I pray that he will honour me by extending his favour towards me."

DHĀRIṆĪ: Nipuṇikā, my revered lord will no doubt respond to Her ladyship's request as he ought to.

NIPUṆIKĀ: As Her Majesty commands. (*exits*)

KAUŚIKĪ: My lord, if you would be so kind, permit me to pay my respects to Prince Mādhavasena and share with him the happiness he experiences from securing an alliance with Your Majesty.

DHĀRIṆĪ: Revered lady, this is hardly the moment for you to leave us.

AGNIMITRA: Revered lady, if you so desire, I shall be happy to include your felicitations to the prince in my letters to His Lordship.

KAUŚIKĪ: The affection that Your Majesties have for me, lay me under a deep debt of gratitude.

DHĀRIṆĪ: Now, let my revered lord command me. What else would he wish me to perform to further his pleasure?

AGNIMITRA: What more can I wish for that would please me? Yet, I have one further request:

With graciousness let your face be always bright, 20
my proud queen; this I ask on behalf of your rival.

Benediction

I now fervently pray that my subjects 21
will not be subjected to calamities,
natural or created by man;
that no raids, invasions by enemies
and other such disasters fall upon them
while Agnimitra remains their protector.

End of Act Five

and of the play

Mālavikāgnimitram

VIKRAMORVASIYAM

(Vikrama and Urvaśī)

A Play in Five Acts

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PROLOGUE

Chanters of the Benediction

SŪTRADHĀRA : (*literally, 'he who holds the threads'*) Director/Producer and over-all manager of the theatre; usually plays the chief role, that of the hero.

MĀRIṢA : His assistant, probably in charge of the stage and the cast.

PLAY

PURŪRAVA : King of the lunar dynasty, ruling at Pratiṣṭhāna at the confluence of Yamunā with Gaṅgā. Referred to as the Royal Sage (Rājarṣi), the hero (nāyaka).

URVAŚĪ : An Apsarā, dancer in Indra's Court in Svarga; the heroine (nāyikā).

PRINCE ĀYUS : Son of the king by Urvaśī.

SŪTA : The Royal Charioteer.

MĀṆAVAKA : The vidūṣaka, the king's close friend and companion.

CITRALEKHĀ : An Apsarā, Urvaśī's close friend.

AUŚĪNARĪ : The Queen-Consort, Royal Princess of Kāśī.

NIPUṆIKĀ : Lit. 'The Clever One', personal attendant of the Queen.

LĀTAVYA : The chamberlain; chief officer of the Royal Household; in charge of the Private Apartments (antaḥpura) of the Queen, junior queens, princesses and other noble ladies of the Queen's Court.

KIRĀTĪ : A huntress; a mountain-dweller.

YAVAṆĪ : Bow-Bearer; yavanī maybe Graeco-Bactrian.

RAMBHĀ
MENAKĀ
SAHAJANYĀ : Apsarās, companions of Urvaśī; dancers in Indra's Court.

CITRARATHA : King of the Gandharvas, messenger of Indra.

NĀRADA	:	A sage, Indra's emissary to the King.
PĀLLAVA	:	Pupils of the sage Bharata.
GĀLAVA		
SATYAVATĪ	:	An ascetic lady in whose charge Urvaśī leaves her infant son.

VARIOUS ATTENDANTS IN THE PALACE

BARDS	:	Back stage
SINGER	:	Back stage in Act Four
AERIAL VOICES	:	Indra's messenger in Act Two; the sage who offers the Gem of Reunion to the king in Act Four.

PERSONS MENTIONED

INDRA	:	Lord of the Devas.
BHARATA MUNI	:	The sage who is considered the author of the Nāṭyaśāstra.
BṚHASPATI	:	Preceptor of the Devas.
KEŚĪ	:	Lord of the Golden City and Dānava monarch.
KUBERA	:	Lord of Riches
DIKPĀLAS	:	Guardians of the Universe

SCENE

Act One	:	The skies and pathways in space used by the celestials; and by the king in his chariot; Hemakūta (Golden Peak) in the mountains of the Himalayas, abode of Kubera, Gandharvas and Kinnaras.
Act Two	:	The gardens of the king's palace in Pratiṣṭhāna, situated at the confluence of Gaṅgā and Yamunā.
Act Three	:	The same palace at nightfall, on the terrace.
Act Four	:	Gandhamādana Groves and Kumāra's sacred grove nearby.
Act Five	:	Pratiṣṭhāna; the Royal palace.

TIME

Acts One, Two and Three : Early Spring.

Act Four	:	Beginning of the rainy season.
Act Five	:	Possibly follows sometime after Act Four after the return of the king with Urvaśī from the Gandhamādana region.

ACT ONE

Invocations[1]

He, Who, pervading the twin worlds clamorous, 1
and abiding beyond,
is spoken of as the Supreme One
in the sacred utterance of quintessential wisdom;
in Whom, those imperishable letters spell the Word,
Īśvara signifying in all its fullness
Him, Him alone, none else,
shapes and holds its true meaning;
He, Who is sought deep within the secret self
with all vital breaths strictly controlled
by those who yearn for final release;
may He, The World's Pillar, Eternal,
attainable with ease through firm faith
and contemplation;
grant you ineffable happiness,

After the recital of the invocation the sūtradhāra enters.

SUTRĀDHĀRA: The preliminary rites[2] have been completed. (*turning towards the greenroom*) Hey there! Māriṣa! Would you step out, Sir?

MĀRIṢA (*entering*): Here I am, learned mentor.

SUTRĀDHĀRA: Māriṣa, listen. Our audience this evening has seen the plays of older poets many times.Therefore, I am presenting today a completely new play never staged as yet – Kālidāsa's *VIKRAMORVAŚĪYAM*. See to it that the cast is word perfect and well-rehearsed in their respective roles.

MĀRIṢA: Yes Sir, as our learned mentor commands. (*exits*)

SUTRĀDHĀRA: Let me now pay my respects to the noble members of this audience and request their permission[3] to commence the performance.

Bows to the audience.

Whether as a favour to us 2
who crave your indulgence gracious,

or out of regard for the hero most noble
and the plot superbly crafted,
I beg you to give your undivided attention
to this drama, Kālidāsa's creation.

Voices heard in the distance : Protect us, ... protect us....

SUTRĀDHĀRA (*listening intently*) : Ha! Strange indeed! What sounds are these. ....that come close on the heels of my announcement? Like the calls of distress of hen-curlews ?

[4]Are these the sounds of bees ecstatic 3
drunk on the honey of blossoms?
or the plangent tones of cuckoos
calling their mates far-off?
perhaps, Kinnarīs have begun to sing
songs of praise in high clear voices
in indistinct but melodious tones
on all sides of the resonant sky
haunted by roaming bands of Devas?[5]

Voices in the background : "Protect us, protect us : Whoever is a friend of the Devas. ....whoever ranges in the vast expanse of space".

SUTRĀDHĀRA (*reflecting for a few moments*) : Ah! I see.

While returning after her dance of adoration 4
of Kubera, Kailāsa's lord, celestial Urvaśī
sprung from the thigh of the ancient sage, Nārāyaṇa,[6]
Friend of Man, was seized forcibly
by enemies of the Devas; the Apsarās,
her companions now cry out piteously for help.

(he exits)

End of Prologue

A group of Apsarās now rush on stage.

APSARĀS: Help! Help! Protect us....whoever is a friend of the Devas. ...whoever ranges through the vast expanse of space.

With a toss of the curtain, King Purūrava mounted on his chariot enters with his charioteer.

PURŪRAVA: Stop crying out for help. Come to me, Purūrava, returning from worshipping the Sun-God. What might be the cause for you ladies to cry out for protection ?

RAMBHĀ: The outrage perpetrated by the Dānavas.

PURŪRAVA: What outrage? And how has it affected you ladies?

RAMBHĀ: Listen, great king and I shall explain it to you. Our dearest friend Urvaśī, the exquisitely tender weapon employed by Indra who is ever fearful of extraordinary austerities performed by anyone in the universe...this Urvaśī who is the glowing jewel set on the forehead of Svarga[a] ...this same Urvaśī who has put to shame the goddess Śrī[b] herself overly proud of her beauty. ....has been abducted. Seen accidentally sometime by the Dānava, Keśī, Lord of Hiraṇyapurī;[c] she was seized by him halfway as she was returning from Kubera's mansion, and taken captive together with her friend Citralekhā.

PURŪRAVA: I see. Can you tell me in which direction this despicable villain was headed?

SAHAJANYĀ: Northeast.

PURŪRAVA: Well then, since we know that, there is no need to distress yourselves any longer, noble ladies. I shall do my best to rescue your friend and bring her back to you.

APSARĀS: These are indeed words most worthy of one only once-removed from the Moon-God.

PURŪRAVA: Ladies, now you have to tell me where exactly you will be awaiting my return.

APSARĀS: Right over there...there on top of Hemakūta[d]

PURŪRAVA: Sūta. Sir, urge the horses on to race swiftly in a northeasterly direction.

SŪTA: Yes, I shall do so, my lord. (*urges the horses on*)

PURŪRAVA (*marking the chariot's speed*) : Splendid, splendid, Sir. How swiftly the chariot rushes onwards! If you keep this speed up there is not the slightest doubt that I could well overtake Vinatā's son Garuḍa[7] himself......even if he had a headstart. In comparison, the pursuit of this miserable villain who has the audacity to do grievous wrong to the Munificent Lord, Indra, is mere child's play. Mark this, Sūta!

> Pulverized by the pounding wheels of the chariot 5
> these dense rainclouds turn into clouds of dust

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a. The worlds of light.
b. Śrī, Lakṣmī, Goddess of Beauty.
c. City of Gold.
d. Golden Peak.

fleeing before my chariot.
Spinning with incredible speed the wheels
seem to create another series of spokes
within the interstices.
The bright plumes nodding on the horse's heads
stand erect, motionless from the wind's speed
as if painted in a picture.
The silken banner stretches straight out, smooth
without a crease from the top of its staff
to its own outer edge.

Exit the king mounted on his chariot with his charioteer.

RAMBHĀ: The Royal Sage has left on his mission; let us also proceed to the appointed meeting place. Come, dear friends, let us go.

APSARĀS: Yes, let us do that. (*they mime descent from the sky to the mountain peak*)

RAMBHĀ (*somewhat anxious*): I wonder if the Royal Sage will be able to extract the wounding dart from our hearts.

MENAKĀ: Don't doubt that, my friend.

RAMBHĀ: The Dānavas are almost invincible.

MENAKĀ: Listen, whenever a war is imminent even the mighty Indra has this same king brought from the middle world[8] with all honour, to appoint him supreme commander of the army of victory.

RAMBHĀ: May he be always victorious!

SAHAJANYĀ (*watching the horizon closely*): Cheer up, friends, cheer up! Look over there....can't you see the chariot named Somadatta,[9] the chariot of the Royal Sage, its banner blazoned with a leaping deer flying high? Surely the king would not return without accomplishing his mission.

All look up at the sky; the king mounted on his chariot, and the charioteer enter; Urvaśī, her eyes closed in terror is seated in the chariot supported by Citralekhā.

CITRALEKHĀ: Compose yourself, dearest friend, compose yourself.

PURŪRAVA: Calm yourself, calm yourself, beautiful lady.

Lady so fearful! Gone is the terror
raised by the dread foe of the Devas.
Great is the power of The Wielder of the Thunderbolt
that protects the Triple-World. 6

Open those long lovely eyes of yours as the lotus-pool
opens its large blossoms at the first light of dawn.[e]

CITRALEKHĀ: Ah! Misery! What a terrible predicament. She barely breathes to mark that she is still alive; but she has not regained consciousness.

PURŪRAVA: So terrified was Her Ladyship that she is in deep shock.

Her heart fragile as the stalk of a flower, 7[f]
has not yet stopped trembling;
see how the spot of sandalwood cream
from the Tree of Paradise, throbbing
between her heaving breasts tells it all.[g]

CITRALEKHĀ: Come, come, my friend, Urvaśī, your behaviour is unworthy of an Apsarā.

Urvaśī slowly regains consciousness.

PURŪRAVA (*delighted*): Now, you see your friend coming to:

Like the night freed from darkness 8
as the rising moon stands poised on the horizon;
like the flames of a fire at night
beginning to burn almost smokeless;
like Gaṅgā muddied by crumbling banks
restored to her pristine translucence;
this lady of exquisite form
is now poised on the verge of consciousness.

CITRALEKHĀ: Ah! My dear friend, compose yourself; those miserable villains, enemies of the Devas have been defeated.

URVAŚĪ (*opening her eyes*) : Really? By mighty Indra who knows all by his omniscient divine power?

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e. Variant reading for 6 : 6 : as the lotus-plant opens its lotus-eyes when dark night ends.

f. Ranganatha places this extra verse before v.7

The rise and fall of the garland of Mandara flowers
wedged between her heaving breasts
reveals without the least doubt
the wild beating of her heart.

g. Variant reading of v.7:

Even now her heart delicate as a flower
will not cease its wild terror-induced tremors;
the hem of her silken stole somehow caught
in the deep cleavage of her full breasts
sends its message.

CITRALEKHĀ: No, not by mighty Indra. But by this Royal Sage, Purūrava, whose power is equal to that of great Indra.

URVAŚĪ (*gazing at the king, speaks to herself*) : These Dānavas have done me a greaṭ favour, have they not?

PURŪRAVA (*gazing ardently at Urvaśī now fully restored, muses and speaks to himself*) : Is it to be wondered that all the Apsarās who had vainly attempted to seduce the sage Nārāyaṇa had to retire shamefaced when they looked upon this exquisitely lovely lady who had just sprung from his thigh ! But, come to think of it, it is not possible that she could be the offspring of an ascetic; could she? In which case,

In the act of her creation the soft-splendoured Moon 9
must have become her progenitor; or, perhaps,
the Churner of Minds and Hearts, the God of Love Himself
whose very essence is surging passion.
May be it was the Genius of Spring
who scatters flowers with a lavish hand.
But an ancient hermit with mind numbed
by the barrenness of reiterative recitation
of sacred formulas learned by rote,
and senses withered withdrawn from life's manifold delights,
how could such a one grown old wrapped in silence
fashion a form so captivating as this !

URVAŚĪ (*turning to Citralekhā*): Where are our friends, my dear?

CITRALEKHĀ: This great king who came to our rescue would know best.

PURŪRAVA (*looking intently at Urvaśī*) : In deepest dejection.[10] Consider this, my lady!

If you had stood by chance once and once only 10
in the path of a man's eyes rewarding them richly,
my beautiful lady, lacking your presence,
he, even he would yearn for yet another sight of you.
How much more would your friends whose hearts with tenderness
overflow, yearn to see you once more.

URVAŚĪ (*aside*) : How noble are his words! But why marvel that nectar flows from the Moon? (*aloud*) For that very reason my heart is in a flurry of excitement to see them.

PURŪRAVA (*pointing to a spot in the distance*):

Look over there, my lady of exquisite beauty, 11
your friends on Hemakūṭa can now see your face,

its radiance restored, resembling the Moon
freed from the shadow of an eclipse.

CITRALEKHĀ: Look, look, dear friend, look there.

URVAŚĪ (*looks longingly at the king*): ....such pain that equals mine...eyes drinking me in....

CITRALEKHĀ (*with a knowing intonation of voice*): ....oh!...who?

URVAŚĪ (*bristling*) : Why, our friends, of course, who else?

RAMBHĀ (*watching with joy*): Look, there is the Royal Sage...bringing our dear friend Urvaśī....with Citralekhā beside her....appearing like the Moon in conjunction with the twin stars of Viśākhā.

MENAKĀ (*scanning the sky*): Now both objectives dear to our hearts have been accomplished. Our dear friends have been rescued and brought back to us and the Royal Sage has returned unscathed.

SAHAJANYĀ : Well spoken; it is the truth. The Dānavas are invincible, almost ...we know.

PURŪRAVA: Sūta, Sir, here is the peak of the mountain we are headed for. Let the chariot descend and land.

SŪTA: As my lord commands. (*he does so*)

PURŪRAVA (*feeling the jolting of the chariot as the wheels grind to a halt; speaking to himself*) : Aha! What happiness indeed! The landing is rough no doubt, but it brings its rich reward!

The chariot jolts, wheels grinding to a halt; 12
limbs jostling limbs, hers and mine;
the touch of the lady with buttocks
perfectly rounded like chariot wheels
sends thrills through my limbs, hairs standing on end
as if Love is putting forth tender shoots!

URVAŚĪ (*embarrassed*) : Could you move a little that way, dear Citralekhā?

CITRALEKHĀ: No, I'm afraid I can scarcely move.

RAMBHĀ: Come along, dear friends, let us go and meet the Royal Sage and honour him; for he has done us a great favour.

The Apsarās come towards the king singing songs of praise.

PURŪRAVA: Sūta, Sir, hurry! Let the chariot come to a standstill; steady it, so that,

This lovely lady with fine arching eyebrows, 13
eager to meet her friends, awaiting her with equal eagerness,

may do so even as Spring's glory
hurries to clasp the vines expecting her arrival.

The Sūta brakes and steadies the chariot.

APSARĀS: Mark how splendidly victory sits on the brows of the great king! Permit us to offer our felicitations to His Majesty.

PURŪRAVA: And I mine to Your Noble Ladyships on the happy occasion of reunion with your dear friends.

Urvaśī alights from the chariot with Citralekhā's help.

URVAŚĪ: Ah! My dear, dear friends, hold me in your arms as tightly as you can. Little did I hope to see you all ever again.

The Apsarās quickly surround Urvaśī and embrace her with affection.

RAMBHĀ: May the great king live for aeons as protector of the wide Earth.

A commotion of confused sounds in the background.

SŪTA: My lord, out of the east comes a tremendous sound of chariots rushing with incredible speed.

And now an illustrious personage adorned 14
with armlets of gold glowing as if fresh out of the fire,
is descending from the sky to alight on this peak,
like a glistening rain cloud streaked with flashes of lightning....

The Apsarās look up in surprise.

APSARĀS: Ah! It is Citraratha.

Citraratha enters and seeing the king addresses him with great respect.

CITRARATHA: How splendid Your Honour appears mantled in the glory of victory great enough to lay even great Indra under an obligation!

PURŪRAVA: Ah! Here is the King of the Gandharvas! (*alights from his chariot*) Welcome, dear friend. (*they clasp hands*)

CITRARATHA: Dear friend, Purūrava, listen; informed by Nārada of Urvaśī's abduction by Keśī, the Dānava, Indra, The Doer of a Hundred Mighty Deeds, ordered the Gandharva army out to rescue her. As we were on our way we heard the bards celebrating your victory with songs of praise. Therefore, we came here to meet you. Do us the honour of going with us to bring Urvaśī into the presence of Indra, The Magnanimous. For, Your Honour has this day rendered Indra a great service that would please him immensely. Consider this, my friend:

In the beginning, this lady incomparable 15
was the gift of Nārāyaṇa to the Lord of Tempests;[h]
now, she is the gift of a friend, yourself,
who have wrested her from the Dānava's grasp.

PURŪRAVA: O, no, no, that is not so:

It is beyond all doubt the prowess, 16
of Indra, The Wielder of the Thunderbolt
by which his partisans triumph against his foes.
Mark! Even the echo of a lion's roar
surging out of a mountain cave
strikes terror into the hearts of great tuskers.

CITRARATHA: Such words are indeed most becoming on your part. Modesty is truly the ornament of valour.[11]

PURŪRAVA: Citraratha, my friend, this may not be the right moment to present myself before the Lord of a Hundred Powers[j]. It is best that you yourself present Her Ladyship to our lord.

CITRARATHA: As Your Honour thinks fit. This way, ladies, come this way.

The Apsarās prepare to leave with Citraratha.

URVAŚĪ (*aside to Citralekhā*): Listen, dear friend. I am not able to bring myself to bid farewell to the Royal Sage, even though he is my benefactor. Speak for me.

CITRALEKHĀ (*aside to the king*): Your Majesty, Urvaśī wishes to say this: "With His Majesty's permission I desire to take His Majesty's glory with me as my dearest companion to Svarga."

PURŪRAVA: Yes, of course; farewell, until we meet again.

The Apsarās following the gandharvas mime flying up.

URVAŚĪ (*pretending as if something prevented her from being airborne*): Oh! What is this! Ah! It is my long single strand of pearls caught in a tangle of twigs of this vine. (*turns round as if to look at it and under this pretext manages to catch one last look at the king*) O, Citralekhā, won't you disentangle this thing for me?

CITRALEKHĀ (*with a meaningful look*): O, dear, your string of pearls is indeed intricately knotted in the tangle of twigs; not very easily disentangled, I am afraid. However, I shall do my best.

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h. Indra
j. Indra

URVAŚĪ (*smilling*): Dear friend, you had better remember these words of yours.

Citralekhā pretends to disentangle Urvaśī's pearl-string with great care.

PURŪRAVA (*watching this little drama speaks to himself*) :

You have done me a kindness, have you not, 17
O, slender vine? You delayed her from leaving
for a few brief moments; and I saw her once again,
her face half turned, her eyes brimming with love.

SŪTA: Long-lived Majesty! See,

Having hurled into the vast ocean of salt 18
these Dānavas who had greatly wronged
Luminous Indra, the magical missile
presided over by the swift Wind-God, Vāyu,
has come home and re-entered your quiver
like some great snake slithering back into its burrow.

PURŪRAVA: Well then, bring the chariot closer so that I may mount it.

The charioteer brings the chariot closer; the king mounts it. Urvaśī still gazing at the king sighs deeply and departs with her companions and Citraratha.

URVAŚĪ (*looks with intense longing at the king; speaks to herself*): Let me take my last look at my benefactor.

PURŪRAVA (*looks with anguish up at the sky in the direction taken by Urvaśī*): Alas! Love always seems to send us out on unattainable quests, does he not?

This celestial lady so lovely 19
winging her way home upwards
into the regions of her parent's Middle Stride [12]
drags my heart out of my body after her
with never a thought,
like the Queen-Swan the lotus fibre
out of the stalk whose tip she splits open.

All exit

ACT TWO

The vidūṣaka enters.

VIDŪṢAKA (*laughing hilariously*): Ha.......hahaha.........ha.... Here I am close to bursting with the king's secret....ha....like a guest at some lavish banquet stuffed to the hilt with delicious food... I am afraid I simply cannot hold my tongue any longer...certainly not where there are people; so I had better stay put here....here in this secluded spot adjoining the Devacchanda Palace[13]...hardly anyone comes here. Here I shall wait for my dear friend until he rises from the seat of judgement in the Hall of Justice. (*walks a few paces and stations himself in a patio*)

Enter a maid, one of the Queen's attendants.

MAID: Her Majesty, the Queen, Royal Princess of Kāśi summoned me and commanded me saying: "My girl, Nipuṇikā, listen, ever since my revered lord returned from worshipping the Glorious One, the sun-God, he seems to be somewhat preoccupied. Go and find out from his bosom friend the noble Māṇavaka what is troubling my lord, the king." Hmmm!.... Now, how do I go about it? What should I do to ferret out this important bit of information for the Queen, out of this apology for a Brāhmaṇa. But come to think of it, no secret of the king's can ever remain safe for long in this miserable wretch's bosom....any more than a dewdrop trembling on the point of a single blade of grass. What I have to do first is to go in search of our worthy Māṇavaka. (*she walks around looking here and there*). Ah! There he is, our noble Māṇavaka, seated quite motionless and silent, like a monkey drawn in a painting; I wonder why! Well, I'll find out...I'd better go close to him. (*she comes close to the vidūṣaka*) Your Honour, I humbly bow to you.

MĀṆAVAKA (*greets her*): God be gracious to you, lady. (*then to himself*) The very sight of this devilishly clever girl makes me want to blurt out the king's secret, right away. (*aloud*) Well, Nipuṇikā, where are you off to now, gallivanting? Neglecting your practice of music and dance, eh?

NIPUṆIKĀ: I have come only to see you, Sir, by the command of Her Majesty the Queen.

MĀṆAVAKA: What are Her Majesty's commands for me?

NIPUṆIKĀ: Her Majesty is pleased to say this: "Nipuṇikā, you know that His Honour, Māṇavaka has always been partial to me. He never

neglects me whenever I have to suffer undeserved distress."[14]

MĀṆAVAKA (*taken aback, is filled with doubts*) : Why, has my dear friend behaved inconsiderately towards Her Ladyship?

NIPUṆIKĀ: Well Sir, it is true that the Queen was wrongly addressed by our lord by the name of the lady for whom he is pining.

MĀṆAVAKA (*to himself*) : Strange indeed! That His Majesty should have himself disclosed his secret! Then, why on earth do I have to suffer such torment trying to curb my tongue. (*aloud*) Was Her Ladyship addressed as Urvaśī? You see, His Lordship, infatuated with that Apsarā from the moment he sęt eyes on her has not only caused the Queen great sorrow, but me as well.......by being averse to all amusements.

NIPUṆIKĀ (*to herself*) :.Ah! Good! I have breached the fortress of our lord's secret. (*aloud*) Your Honour, what shall I then say to Her Majesty?

MĀṆAVAKA: Tell Her Ladyship, Nipuṇikā, that I shall first attempt to turn my dear friend's mind away from chasing after a mirage, and only then shall I present myself before her.

NIPUṆIKĀ: As Your Honour thinks fit. (*she leaves*)

Voice of a bard back stage.

Bard : Glory, glory to His Majesty!

Equal and similar to your powers, my lord 1
and to the exercise of them we believe
are those of the glorious Sun, the maker of Day.
For their own good you drive beyond the bounds of your realm,
the dark forces that agitate men's minds all over the world,
even as the Sun chases away rolling darkness
from all the worlds and beyond
even to the ends of the Universe for the benefit of all.
For a moment, the Lord of Splendours [15]
stays his course high at the mid-point of the sky;
and you too rest from your labours claiming as you own,
a sixth part of the day[16] to live your life in your private space.

MĀṆAVAKA (*listens to the bard's praises*) : Ah! I see that my dear friend has risen from the seat of judgement and is coming this way. I must go and join him.

Exits.

End of the praveśaka[a].

a. Introductory scene

The king desolated by longing enters with the vidūṣaka at his side.

PURŪRAVA:

The moment I saw her, that lady from the World of Light, 2
of exquisite beauty, she walked straight into my heart
following the path opened by Love, the dolphin-bannered god
when he shot his arrow of unerring aim.

MĀṆAVAKA (*to himself*): No wonder the Royal Princess of Kāśī is so deeply troubled! Poor lady suffering, helpless, in anguish.

PURŪRAVA: Is the secret I entrusted to you safe?

MĀṆAVAKA (*surprised, reflects sadly*) : Alas! Alas! I am undone! That cunning minx has made a fool of me, worming the secret out of me. Why else would my dear friend ask me this question?

PURŪRAVA (*a little suspicious*) : You seem tongue-tied, my friend. Why?

MĀṆAVAKA: O, you see, I had been keeping such a tight control over my tongue that it is now rather difficult to loosen it. I am unable provide an immediate reply... even to you, Your Honour, Sir.

PURŪRAVA: Good. Now where should we go to distract my mind?

MĀṆAVAKA: Why, to the kitchen, of course.

PURŪRAVA: And why to the kitchen?

MĀṆAVAKA (*as if surprised*): You ask why, Sir? Because ...you will see there the five kinds[17] of delicious foods being prepared; the very sight of the ingredients for these foods being collected and arranged for their preparation will drive all melancholy thoughts from your mind, Your Honour.

PURŪRAVA (*smiling indulgently*): There is no doubt at all that the sight of your favourite delicacies will make you ecstatic. As for me, how can such things delight my mind when it is tortured by longing for what is unattainable?

MĀṆAVAKA: Now Sir, tell me one thing. Her Ladyship Urvaśī has seen you, has she not?

PURŪRAVA: Why yes, she has; what of that?

MĀṆAVAKA: Then, she cannot be unattainable; that is certain.

PURŪRAVA: It is your partiality for me that makes you think that.

MĀṆAVAKA: What you say makes my curiosity grow. Tell me, is Her

Ladyship Urvaśī as incomparable in loveliness of form, as I am in ugliness?

PURŪRAVA: Oh! Māṇavaka; understand that it is impossible to describe her adequately feature by feature . Let me provide you an abstract of her excellence; listen.

MĀṆAVAKA: I am all ears, Sir.

PURŪRAVA:

The jewel to enhance the beauty of all jewels; 3
the embellishment to set off all embellishments;
a measure of comparison, O, my friend,
to serve all comparisons current;
such is the loveliness of her form.

MĀṆAVAKA: I see; so, this is the reason why Your Honour has taken the cātaka's[18] vow; you thirst for a drink divine.

PURŪRAVA: No spot but one secluded can be a refuge for a mind that is restless with longing. So, lead the way, Sir, to the pleasure groves kept apart for the royal ladies.

MĀṆAVAKA (*to himself*) : There seems to be no way out. (*aloud*) This way, Your Honour, come this way. (*turns around*) See this breeze from the south[b] coming to greet you as a guest, Your Honour, as if urged by the pleasure groves to welcome you.

PURŪRAVA (*looking around*) : An appropriate word indeed, to describe this breeze:

This breeze seems to me a real lover 4
mixing love and gallantry in his manner;
he instills honey drops into this Mādhavī[19] vine
even as it leads that Kunda a fine dance indeed.

MĀṆAVAKA : As you do, Sir, the way *you* treat the two ladies....it seems. (*turning around*) Here is the entrance to the pleasure groves of the royal ladies. Be pleased to enter, Your Honour.

PURŪRAVA: You go first.

They enter the pleasure groves.

PURŪRAVA (*looking ahead*): Ah! My friend, how wrong I was to think that entering the pleasure groves of the royal ladies would be a remedy for my heartache.

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b. The term daksina has two meanings : i. the south: ii. a man who is gallant, and courteous.

Eagerly rushing into these gardens 5
to assuage my pain, in truth, I am like one
borne along by the force of a rushing stream
trying vainly to swim against the current.

MĀṆAVAKA: Meaning?

PURŪRAVA:

Shot through already by Five-Arrowed[20] Love, 6
how will my mind that will not be denied
its suit for an object well beyond reach,
survive the sight of these tender shoots
the fragrant mango trees in the groves put forth
now that the sandal-scented breeze
of the Malaya mountains has picked them clean
of all their old, yellowing leaves?

MĀṆAVAKA: Oh! Stop moaning. Soon the Bodiless One[c] himself will come to your aid and fulfill your heart's desire.

PURŪRAVA: I accept the words spoken by a Brāhmaṇa.

They turn.

MĀṆAVAKA: Observe, Your Honour, what beauty the pleasure groves wear with the coming of spring!

PURŪRAVA: O yes indeed; I see it at every step; here itself:

Before us appear Kurabakas darkish-blue at the sides, 7
their tips pale-rose like the nails of young women.
Young Aśokas gathering redness are lovely
with clusters of buds standing on tiptoe eager to unfold.
On mango trees fresh sprays of flowers appear russet
fringed by filaments holding up still unripe pollen-heads.
Poised midway between girlhood and the first flush of youth,
stands, O, my friend, Spring's rich beauty and splendour.

MĀṆAVAKA: Your Honour, here is a jewelled marble seat protected by this jasmine bower awaiting your arrival, with its own flower-offering of jasmines fallen on it as the black bees rustled through them. Do the flower-strewn seat a favour; accept it.

PURŪRAVA: If you wish, Sir.

They sit down.

MĀṆAVAKA: Now, seated comfortably as you are with your eyes dwelling

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c. Love; Kāma, burnt to ashes by Śiva. (See glossary).

on these lovely flowering vines, charmed by them, my friend, dispel the deep yearning that Your Honour feels for Urvaśī.

PURŪRAVA (*sighing deeply*):

These vines in the gardens, with gently curving twigs 8
and bright with blossoms do not charm my eyes.
Having once seen the loveliness of her form
my eyes have become fastidious, my friend.

Think of some plan that will make my prayers fruitful.

MĀṆAVAKA (*laughing out loud*): A fine thing to ask of me, my friend. The Moon who helped great Indra infatuated with Ahalyā[21]....and I....if I were to help you besotted with Urvaśī .... we will be considered stark, raving mad....

PURŪRAVA: O, don't talk like that. Deep affection among friends always finds solutions to problems.

MĀṆAVAKA : All right, let me think; and don't you interrupt my meditations with you lamentations.

PURŪRAVA (*indicating that he feels a good omen speaks to himself*):

She whose face is luminous as the full moon 9
is not easy to win; yet, strangely I feel
a sensation, indefinable; it is Love's doing.
All on a sudden my heart lifts swept by pure bliss.
It must foretell the imminent success
of all my fondest expectations.

He remains rapt in love and hopeful. Using the path in the sky, Urvaśī and Citralekhā enter.

CITRALEKHĀ: Where are you off to now without telling me where we are going?

URVAŚĪ (*restless with passion, feels embarrassed*) : Why do you ask me such a question, now at this moment? You do remember don't you, that you laughed and twitted me when we were about to fly up from Hemakūta, and my flight was momentarily obstructed? Hmm................?

CITRALEKHĀ: What? Are you then really going to meet the Royal Sage, Purūrava?

URVAŚĪ: I have thrown all shame to the winds, I guess.

CITRALEKHĀ: And whom has my dear friend sent in advance? [22]

URVAŚĪ: My heart.

CITRALEKHĀ: But have you given careful thought to this step that you are taking?

URVAŚĪ: The God who makes the world go mad for love himself urges me to take this step. What else is there to be considered?

CITRALEKHĀ: I have nothing to say in reply.

URVAŚĪ: Then let my dear friend instruct me which path I should take to avoid obstacles on the way.

CITRALEKHĀ: O, don't you worry, my dear friend. Don't you remember His Holiness, the Divine Preceptor, Bṛhaspati, teaching us the ritual of knotting the hair using a magical charm and incantation, the aparājitā,[23] which renders us unassailable by enemies of the Devas?

URVAŚĪ: I am afraid I had forgotten all about that Rite, my dear friend.

They descend to the Path of the Siddhas[d].

CITRALEKHĀ: Here we are, over the palace of the Royal Sage, the crest jewel of his capital, Pratiṣṭhana which seems to look at itself mirrored in the holy waters of the glorious goddesses Bhāgirathī and Yamunā where they meet and mingle.

URVAŚĪ (*gazing down*) : Indeed, it must be said that this is Svarga brought down to Earth. (*reflecting*) Listen, dear Citralekhā, where might that king be who is ever compassionate to those in distress?

CITRALEKHĀ: Well, we can find out by descending to the Pramadavana[e] yonder which looks as if it is a part of our Nandanavana itself, the Gardens of Paradise.

They descend.

CITRALEKHĀ (*noticing the king, speaks excitedly*): There, do you see him, dear friend Urvaśī, there he, is waiting for you, like the glorious lord, the Moon newly risen and waiting expectantly for his bride, Moonlight.

URVAŚĪ (*gazes with ardent admiration*) : Ah! My dear friend, the great king now looks even more handsome that when I first saw him.

CITRALEKHĀ: That's to be expected, I guess. Come then, let us go and meet him.

URVAŚĪ: Wait, using the charm, Tiraskariṇī[f] to make myself invisible, let

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d. The Perfected beings.
e. Pleasure groves of the royal ladies.
f. A device to make the user invisible.

me stand close to him and listen to what he is saying. Here in this secluded place he seems to be conversing earnestly with his close companion.

CITRALEKHĀ: As you wish.

They both make themselves invisible and move close to the king and the vidūṣaka.

MĀṆAVAKA: My dear friend, I have found a way of bringing about your union with the hard-to-get lady.

The king remains silent.

URVAŚĪ: Who is this lady, whom the king so eagerly desires, who plays so hard to get?

CITRALEKHĀ: Why do you keep on acting as if you were a mere mortal?

URVAŚĪ: Because I am afraid to use my power and find out the truth all on a sudden.

MĀṆAVAKA: Did Your Honour hear what I said just now? That I have thought of a plan for bringing you and your beloved together?

PURŪRAVA: Well, tell me about it.

MĀṆAVAKA: Fall asleep and perchance dream that you are united in love with the Lady Urvaśī or, paint her portrait and stand looking at it.

URVAŚĪ (*delighted*) : Courage, mean-spirited heart! Now let your fears be dispelled.

PURŪRAVA: Both your suggestions are useless; they simply won't work.

How can blessed sleep visit my eyes, offering me a dream 10
wherein I can hold my beloved in my arms,
while deep within, Love's wounding darts unceasingly strike
piercing to become embedded in my heart quivering with pain?
And as I draw her lovely face, my friend, tears welling up
will blind my eyes before I complete her portrait.

CITRALEKHĀ: Did you hear that, my dear friend?

URVAŚĪ: Yes, I did; but it is not sufficient to reassure my heart.

MĀṆAVAKA: This is as far as my ingenuity goes.

PURŪRAVA (*sighing deeply*):

Perhaps she is unaware of the agony 11
that breaks my heart into pieces;
or perhaps knowing well through her divine powers
the great love I bear her, she scorns me.

So, by making my passion for union with the lady
wither away without bearing fruit,
let the god who wields the five potent flower-arrows
be satisfied that he has gained his desired end.[24]

CITRALEKHĀ: Now did you hear that?

URVAŚĪ: Alas! Shame upon me! That he should think of me this way! How can I now face him and answer to these charges? No. Instead I shall create a fragment of birch bark by my divine powers and inscribe my answer on it.

CITRALEKHĀ: Perfect. Go ahead.

Urvaśī mimes the act of writing a letter on a piece of birch bark and throws it down.

MĀṆAVAKA (*noticing some thing fallen on the ground is fearful*) : Oh! What is this thing lying in front of us! May all the gods protect me! It looks like the cast-off skin of a snake.

PURŪRAVA (*looking at it, laughs*) : It seems to be a piece of birch bark with writing on it.

MĀṆAVAKA: It might well be a message from Lady Urvaśī, invisible, who having had an earful of your lamentations, Your Honour, decided to reassure you that she shared your passion and your pain.

PURŪRAVA: Ah! This chariot of the mind! To what heights will it not fly up! (*he picks up the piece of birch bark, reads it and is overcome with joy*) O, my dear, dear friend! What a happy guess that was!

MĀṆAVAKA: Your Honour, I wish to know what the message is; would you be so kind as to read it aloud?

URVAŚĪ: Aha! Well said, noble Sir. You are truly a refined man-about-town, I see.

PURŪRAVA: Well then, listen, I shall read it out to you. (*reads it out*)

O, my noble lord, if I truly feel for you 12
who loves me so passionately,
as you believe I do, not knowing my true heart,
why then, my lord do the breezes blowing
from the groves of Indra's Paradise[g],
burn my limbs as I toss restless
upon a bed strewn with pārijāta flowers[25]
never-fading, ever-fragrant?

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g. Nandana-Vana.

URVAŚĪ: What will he say now, I wonder.

CITRALEKHĀ: Why, whatever had to be said has already been spoken eloquently by his pale, wasted limbs that wear the thinness of slender lotus-stalks.

MĀṆAVAKA: Listen, dear friend, I am happy for you; this turn of events must bring you great consolation, Your Honour............ ....as delicious sweets offered to me on festive occasions when I am dying of hunger.

PURŪRAVA: A consolation, Sir? You call this a consolation? Just that?

Ah! My friend, I feel at this moment as I would 13
if my face with its upturned lashes were close to hers—
and her eyes swimming drunk with love.
For this is the song in my beloved's heart
flowing in well-turned words of tender love,
to be the graceful poem inscribed on this bit of bark:
a revelation of her love that equals mine.

URVAŚĪ (*overhearing this*) : Now our love is divided equally between us.

PURŪRAVA: My dear friend, Māṇavaka, take this letter from me. The letters inscribed by her hand might get smudged by beads of sweat forming on my fingers.

MĀṆAVAKA (*taking it*): My friend, you see this...this is the blossom that Lady Urvaśī is holding before your eyes...the flower of your most cherished desire....Now, she cannot cheat you of its fruit...can she?

URVAŚĪ: Dear friend, Citralekhā, my heart quails at the thought of meeting him. Removing the charm of invisibility from your person, reveal your self to the king and speak to him those words that I myself would choose to say to him. In the meantime, I shall try to control my emotions.

CITRALEKHĀ: Well then, I shall do as you wish. (*removes the charm of invisibility, and approaches the king*) Glory, glory to the great king!

PURŪRAVA (*delighted*) : Ah! It is Citralekhā; welcome, my lady, welcome. Gracious lady:

In the absence of your dear friend, your presence 14
does not delight me as it did once before;
Yamunā once seen flowing together with Gaṅgā
does not call forth the same joy when seen by herself.

CITRALEKHĀ: First appears the bank of clouds, then the branched lightning; is that not so, my lord?

MĀṆAVAKA (*whispers to the king*) : So, my friend, this is not Urvaśī but her dear friend!

CITRALEKHĀ: Bowing her head low, my lord, Urvaśī requests the great king........

PURŪRAVA (*interrupting*): What are her commands?

CITRALEKHĀ: She says, "In that dire predicament when she fell into the hands of the enemies of the Devas, the great king was her sole protector. Now, that same Urvaśī from the moment she set eyes on my lord, has fallen into the hands of one more powerful—the god who maddens the whole world. She pleads that the great king come once more to her aid."

PURŪRAVA: My lady, the very seeing of your face is auspicious; listen:

> You speak of her who is the delight of my eyes 15
> as restless with longing. But do you not see me,
> Purūrava, seething with passion for her?
> Mutual is our love forged by the God of Memories.[26]
> The perfect moment of oneness happens
> only when red-hot metal meets metal red-hot.

CITRALEKHĀ (*comes close to Urvaśī*): Dear friend, Urvaśī, come here. Seeing that the God of Love is even more cruel to your beloved, I have turned messenger of love for him.

URVAŚĪ (*removing the charm that veils her in invisibility*) : Aha! My dear friend, look how you abandon me so quickly, with such ease, it seems!

CITRALEKHĀ: O, really! We'll soon see who abandons whom. In the meantime, better remember your good manners.

URVAŚĪ (*overcome with bashfulness, approaches the king*) : Victory, victory to the great king!

PURŪRAVA: Beautiful lady,

> Now that have you greeted me by that word 16
> which till this moment has not passed your lips
> to acclaim any other than your lord,
> Thousand-Eyed Indra, I am victorious indeed.

He takes Urvaśī by the hand and seats her.

MĀṆAVAKA: My lady, aoes the king's very dear friend here not deserve to be greeted as well?

Urvaśī smiling bows to him.

MĀṆAVAKA: May Your Ladyship always prosper !

The voice of a messenger from Svarga is heard in the background.

Attended by the Regents of the Universe[27], 17
the Lord of Storm-Winds wishes to see today
the performance of sage Bharata's play;
the play he taught you, noble ladies,
wherein the subtle interplay of the eight rasas[28]
is bodied forth in polished acting.

All listen closely to the aerial message; Urvaśī, severely disappointed shakes her head sadly with downcast eyes.

CITRALEKHĀ: Did my dearest friend hear what the messenger from Svarga announced just now? You should now request the great king here to grant you permission to leave.

URVAŚĪ: Ah! Citralekhā, my friend, How can I? I have no words to do so.

CITRALEKHĀ: Great king, , this person is dependent on another's will and pleasure. His Majesty should therefore permit her to leave so that she will not be found guilty in the eyes of the Devas, of disobedience.

PURŪRAVA (*trying to compose his emotions and find the right words to say*) : Noble ladies, I cannot go against the express command of your great lord. I can only hope that I am not soon forgotten.

Urvaśī, disconsolate exits with Citralekhā.

PURŪRAVA: What use are these eyes to me now, my friend?

MĀṆAVAKA (*wishing to console the king by showing him Urvaśī's letter*) : Why! My friend, you have........... (*stops and speaks to hismself*) Oh! The letter. Alas! Alas! What have I done? Seeing Urvaśī, I was so lost in wonder that I did not notice that her letter had somehow slipped out of my hand.

PURŪRAVA: My dear fellow, you were about to say something, I guess.

MĀṆAVAKA: O, just this, Your Honour; do not give up so easily. Love for you is deeply rooted in Urvaśī's heart: a love that has reached such a point of burning ardour will not cool off that easily.

PURŪRAVA: My heart sends me the same sort of message; for at the time she was leaving for Svarga, you saw that,

Not being the mistress of her body, 18
she pledged her heart over which she is absolute.
The tempestuous heaving of her breasts
revealed that she was sighing her heart out.

MĀṆAVAKA (*to himself*) : O, how my heart trembles like a leaf, afraid that any moment now, my dear friend will ask for that birchbark letter.

PURŪRAVA: What consolation can these eyes of mine find now? (*remembering the letter*); O, yes, her letter; give me her letter, Sir.

MĀṆAVAKA (*totally woebegone*) : The letter? O, yes, her letter, of course; can't see it anywhere, I am afraid ....it has gone the way of Urvaśī ....vanished, it seems.

PURŪRAVA: O, you blithering fool! So careless in all matters! Go, look for it, Sir.

MĀṆAVAKA (*getting up from his seat*): It might be here; it might be there; it might be anywhere. (*walks around looking for the letter*)

The Queen-Consort, The Royal Princess of Kāśī enters with her retinue.

AUŚĪNARĪ: Listen, my girl, Nipuṇikā...is it true what you told me a while ago? That you saw my revered husband, the king, enter this bower of vines in the company of his friend, the noble Māṇavaka?

NIPUṆIKĀ: Ah! My lady! My gracious lady! Have I at anytime reported anything to you that was not true?

AUŚĪNARĪ: Very well then, here I shall stand, concealed, in the tangle of these vines and listen to the secret conversation of these two friends, and...may be ...check if I can discover whether what you reported to me was true, or not.

NIPUṆIKĀ: As Your Royal Highness thinks fit.

AUŚĪNARĪ (*turning around*): Look, Nipuṇikā, see what that thing is, lying on our path, will you? Looks like a bit of an old rag, does it not? Look there, girl, the southerly breeze is blowing it here, our way.

NIPUṆIKĀ (*looks at the thing closely*): Your highness, it seems to be a piece of birchbark ....and as it turns over in the breeze, I sure can discern some writing on one side of it. And look, look, my gracious lady, it has been blown against my lady's anklet....it is caught on the points of her Majesty's anklet now. (*picks it up*) Your Highness, what shall I do with it? Shall I read it aloud?

AUŚĪNARĪ: No; first read it to yourself. If it is not unfit for my ears then you may read it aloud to me.

NIPUṆIKĀ (*reads it to herself*): Your Royal Highness, it seems to be that same old story blown around. This appears to be a poem written by Urvaśī to our lord. I think it has fallen into our hands on account of negligence on the part of our revered Māṇavaka, obviously.

AUŚĪNARĪ: In which case I think I ought to know what it is all about.

Nipuṇikā reads the poem out to the Queen.

AUŚĪNARĪ: Now, under the pretext of offering this letter, I shall meet that Apsarā-lover. (*with her retinue, the Queen walks round the bower*)

MĀṆAVAKA: Ah! Do you see that, my dear friend? That thing fluttering on one side of the pleasure-hill built over there in the Pramadavana? I wonder what it is that the breeze is toying with.

PURŪRAVA (*getting up*): O, glorious breeze from the south! Friend and dear companion of Spring!

If it is fragrances that are luring you, 19
then waft away the scented pollen
that Spring gathers to lavish
on the blossoming vines.
Why stoop to carry off this thing?
A paltry birch bark, noble Sir?
On it some tender words of love
inscribed in her own hand by my beloved.....
A miserable person pining for love
sustains his life on a hundred trifles..........
such as this, to ease his heartache,
as you well know, my gallant friend;
for did you not press your suit, Sir[h]
to win beautiful Anjanā's love?[29]

NIPUṆIKĀ: Your Royal Highness, a search seems to be under way for this very letter.

AUŚĪNARĪ: Yes, indeed; so I notice.

The vidūṣaka returns after his search for Urvaśī's letter.

MĀṆAVAKA: O, no, no! What is to be done now? I was cruelly deceived by a ragged bit of peacock feather looking like an old, dry, petal of a Punnāga flower[30].

PURŪRAVA: I am totally undone, my friend.

AUŚĪNARĪ (*comes forward holding out the missing letter*): No need to be so upset, my revered lord; here....is the birchbark letter.

h. Variant reading for 19.11-12:
Who knows this better than you?
You would not brush aside my humble suit ?
For, did you not press yours, Sir,
To win beautiful Anjanā's love ?

PURŪRAVA (*flustered*): Ah! It is our queen. Welcome to my queen!

MĀṆAVAKA (*whispering to the king*): Ill-come, Sir, not well-come.

PURŪRAVA (*whispering to the vidūṣaka*): My dear friend, advise me, quickly, what's to be done now?

MĀṆAVAKA (*whispering*): What on earth can a burglar do or say when he is caught red-handed?

PURŪRAVA (*whispering*): You, blockhead! This is no time for jokes. (*aloud*) O, my gracious queen; I am not looking for this; we[j] were searching for something else.

AUŚĪNARĪ: It is most proper to conceal a piece of good luck, is it not?

MĀṆAVAKA: My gracious lady, do give immediate orders to have His Gracious Majesty's midday meal to be served expeditiously... to cure the attack of biliousness that His Honour is suffering from.

AUŚĪNARĪ: Listen, dear girl, Nipuṇikā, see how cleverly the good Brāhmaṇa has come to his dear friend's aid!

MĀṆAVAKA : Ah, my gracious lady, even an ill-tempered goblin can be propitiated by feeding it with good food.[k]

PURŪRAVA : You blockhead! What do you think you're doing? Trying to incriminate me or something?

AUŚĪNARĪ: You are not guilty of anything, Your Honour. It is I, my lord, who am guilty, standing here before you intruding with my unwelcome presence that greatly offends your eyes. I shall leave at once. (*in anger, the queen gets ready to leave*)

PURŪRAVA:

Lovely lady with thighs pale and smooth 20
as the plantain's fresh, young stems !
Be gracious to me; give up your anger.
I am indeed the guilty one.
When she to whom all honour is due is enraged ,
how can the servant not be found guilty?

The king falls at the Queen's feet.

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j. Variant readings:
i. ...we were searching for a leaf tied round with a thread on which some sacred words had been inscribed.
ii. ....we were just about to look for a palm leaf on which details of a meeting of the Council were recorded.

k. ....everyone in this world is made happy fed with delicious food.

AUŚĪNARĪ (*to herself*): I am not so soft-hearted as to be moved that easily and accept his contrition at face value. But, alas, I'm afraid that anger will cool to give place to remorse for having acted with discourtesy.

The Queen leaves with her retinue.

MĀṆAVAKA: Her Majesty leaves, highly displeased....a raging river whose waters are turbid during the season of rains.

PURŪRAVA (*getting up*) : Well, my dear friend, her behaviour was not unreasonable, was it? Consider this:

A lover might pour out a hundred entreaties 21
at his lady's feet. If they do not spring from true feeling
not one sweet phrase would find its way into her heart.
An expert jeweller can tell a gem from a fake coloured red.

MĀṆAVAKA: I must say things have turned out pretty well for you, Your Honour. A man with sore eyes cannot bear to see the flame of a lamp.

PURŪRAVA: Oh! No, no; that is not the case here. My heart belongs to Urvaśī now, no doubt, but I continue to have the same high regard for my queen as before. However, since she has chosen to spurn my entreaties, I can now face her with firm fortitude.[m]

MĀṆAVAKA: Let your "firm fortitude" stand aside for now, while you display some concern for the life of a famished Brāhmaṇa. Come, it is time to bathe and dine.

PURŪRAVA (*looks up at the sky*) : Half the day is gone, it seems:

In the cool, moist soil surrounding the base 22
of yonder tree,
a peacock rests distressed by the intense heat;
splitting open the tip of a golden-champā bud
a black bee enters within to nestle
in its coolness;
abandoning the burning waters
in the expanse of the lake
a black-headed duck resorts to a lotus plant
closer to shore,
whose leaves spread a cool shelter;
in the pleasure-pavilion the parrot
in his golden cage
calls for a drink of water to slake his thirst.

All exit

m. Alternate readings:
i) I shall wait in patience with hopes for the future.
ii) I can adopt a firmer, more casual attitude to her.

ACT THREE

Two pupils of sage Bharata enter

FIRST PUPIL: Friend Pāllava, listen, when our preceptor left for the palace of great Indra, he asked you to carry his seat for him[30] and left me in charge of looking after the Fire Sanctuary. Not being present there, I am asking you this question. Did the performance staged by our revered guru please the celestial audience that watched it?

PĀLLAVA: Well, Gālava, I cannot really say whether the audience was pleased with the performance or not though it did appear to be wholly lost in admiration enjoying the various rasas delineated in the staging of "Lakṣmī Svayamvara"[31] composed by Sarasvatī. But....

GĀLAVA: You stopped without completing your sentence. Does that mean there was some serious flaw in the performance?

PĀLLAVA: O, yes, to be sure, there was. At one point Urvaśī was guilty of an error and spoilt a line.

GĀLAVA: How so?

PĀLLAVA: Urvaśī was playing the role of Lakṣmī; she was asked a question by Menakā in the role of Vāruṇī: "My dear friend," said Menakā, "You see here assembled all the best men in the Triple-World, together with the Regents of the Universe and Keśava himself. To which of them will you offer your love?"

GĀLAVA: Then what happened?

PĀLLAVA: Instead of replying, "To Puruṣottama" the words "To Purūrava" slipped out of Urvaśī's lips.

GĀLAVA: Man's senses follow the dictates of Fate in the form of the future, do they not? Was our guru not furious with her?

PĀLLAVA: O, yes, he was, indeed. He cursed her straightaway. But, great Indra took pity on her.

GĀLAVA: Meaning?

PĀLLAVA: The preceptor cursed Urvaśī saying: "You who have grossly violated my instruction, will from this day lose your celestial status". At the close of the performance as Urvaśī stood, her head bowed in shame, great Indra spoke to her: "Urvaśī, I owe the Royal Sage, Purūrava, my staunch ally in battles, a favour. You may now go to him and live with him on earth as your heart desires until he sees the face of the son you bear to him."

GĀLAVA: How truly worthy of great Indra: he sees deep into men's hearts.

PĀLLAVA (*looking up at the sky*): With all this talk back and forth, we have missed the hour of our preceptor's oblations. Come, let us hurry to attend on him.

They exit.

End of the viṣkambhaka[a]

The Chamberlain enters.

CHAMBERLAIN:

A householder in the prime of his life 1
strives hard to acquire wealth and goods;
in the evening of his life relieved by his sons
of the burden of cares he is free to enjoy his rest.
But as for me, now at the close of my life,
my body wastes away day by day
locked in the prison-house of servitude, alas!
To exert authority over women is truly vexing.

He walks around.

The Royal Princess of Kāśī, strictly observing the rules of her vows, commanded me saying, "Having abjured all feelings of anger and wounded pride in the interests of the sacred vow I have undertaken, I requested the great king through Nipuṇikā to honour me with his presence. Commend me to my lord and convey the request once more." I shall approach His Majesty as soon as he completes his evening prayers. (*turns around to admire the scene*) Ah! How beautiful the palace appears in the evening light!

Peacocks drowsy at nightfall sit still perched 2
like sculpted figures on their roosting rods.
Swirls of smoke from burning incense curling out
through lattice-casements are easily confused
with the forms of doves roosting curled up
in the curving eaves of the tops of turrets.
Aged matrons of the royal household,
devout, ritually purified, set at places
marked with flowers strewn and offerings,
evening's lamps lit, glowing brilliant,
auspicious, to ward off lurking evils.

a. An interlude that serves as a bridge between two acts.

(*looking towards the wings*) Ah! There is our lord already on his way here.

Circled by blazing torches held high in the hands 3
of tall, slender young women attending on him,
the king appears majestic moving like a winged mountain[32]
on whose slopes rise slim, lofty Karṇikāra trees
all ablaze with flaming red blossoms.

I shall wait right here in full view of His Majesty.

The king enters as described and accompanied by the vidūṣaka.

PURŪRAVA (*to himself*):

With my longing pushed aside by cares of state, 4
I have passed the day without too much anguish.
But the night — how can I pass those long hours
dragging wearily on, lacking diversion?

CHAMBERLAIN (*approaching the king*): Glory! Glory to His Majesty! My lord, the Queen, my lady, sends this message: "Tonight the Moon in all its splendour can be viewed from the terrace of the Maṇiharmya[b] Palace. I wish to watch his glory in the company of my lord until the moment the glorious lord is united with Rohiṇī."[33]

PURŪRAVA: Noble Lātavya, advise our queen that I shall do as she wills.

LĀTAVYA: I obey, my lord. (*he exits*)

PURŪRAVA: My dearest friend, Māṇavaka, tell me, do you really think that the queen is making this as a part of carrying out the observances of a vow?

MĀṆAVAKA: Why not, Sir? I guess that Her Ladyship stung by remorse for behaving in such a scurvy manner towards you, Sir...you know, scornfully brushing past you while you lay prostrate at her feet, is using this as a pretext for making amends for her conduct.

PURŪRAVA: Yes you are probably right.

High-born women, proud and sensitive 5
might scorn their husbands fallen at their feet.
Though later stung by remorse, moved by the beloved's
humble pleas for forgiveness, they secretly feel shame
deep within their hearts;
yet, they would let it remain unspoken.

So, let us go; lead the way my friend, to the terrace of the Maṇiharmya Palace that looks exquisite bathed in the evening light.

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b. The Jewelled Palace.

MĀṆAVAKA: Yes Sir, come this way. Here are the crystal steps gently rising up to the terrace. They are as beautiful as Gaṅgā's gleaming waves. Let us go up these steps of the Maṇiharmya Palace that looks exquisite bathed in the evening light.

PURŪRAVA: Then lead the way, Sir.

All mime ascending the stairs.

MĀṆAVAKA (*gazing around*) : Look, my friend, the Lord Moon is about to rise. See how beautiful the eastern sky looks as the veil of darkness is slowly drawn off her face.

PURŪRAVA: Felicitously put, my dear friend.

The first glittering rays of the hare-marked lord, Moon, 6
still hidden behind the Eastern Mountain,
scatter the shreds of darkness some distance away from here.
The moon's ray-fingers push back the straggling strands
from the face glimpsed through dishevelled hair
of the Eastern Quarter
protected by Indra, Lord of Tawny Steeds,
gathering them behind in a knot.
Her face now revealed in glowing beauty enraptures my eyes.

MĀṆAVAKA: Aha... look at that, my friend...the Lord of the Twice-Born, the glorious moon has risen...like a great round sweetmeat with a bit of its lower part bitten off...does it not?

PURŪRAVA (*smiling indulgently*) : One who loves good food sees everything in this world in terms of something delicious to eat.

The king folds his hands reverently and bows to the moon.

PURŪRAVA : Lord of the Night most adorable !

O, Lord, you enter and dwell within the Sun[34], 7
to mark for the godly the times of holy sacraments.
You refresh the Devas and the Pitrs[c]
with the celestial drink of ambrosia to sustain them.
Waxing in strength at night, you destroy the gathering darkness;
you have placed yourself on Śiva's crest; I bow to you.

He kneels down.

MĀṆAVAKA : Your Honour, with your grandsire's permission uttered through a Brāhmaṇā's mouth, will you be kindly seated so that I can also sit down comfortably?

---

c. Ancestors

PURŪRAVA (*accepts the vidūṣaka's request and sits down; glancing at the attendants*): Ladies, when the moon sheds such splendour, is it necessary to burn torches? A pointless repetition! Kindly withdraw and rest yourselves.

ATTENDANTS: As His Majesty commands. (*exit*)

PURŪRAVA (*looking up at the moon*) : Dear friend, Māṇavaka, I believe our queen will not arrive for sometime. As we are alone, by ourselves, let me acquaint you with my state of mind.

MĀṆAVAKA: O, Sir, your state of mind is only too clearly visible. But listen, considering the depth of passion that Urvaśī manifests for you, you can surely sustain yourself on the strength of your hopes.

PURŪRAVA: True enough, I grant you. But I find the anguish in my heart unbearable.

> Like a river whose torrential force 8
> breaks on jagged rocks obstructing its course,
> to split swirling into a hundred streams,
> Love, denied the raptures of union
> by impediments blocking his path
> grows hundredfold to became more powerful.

MĀṆAVAKA: As I see you growing handsomer and handsomer even as your body wastes away, I think I can safely predict that union with your beloved is quite imminent.

PURŪRAVA (*notices an omen*): O, my dearest friend! Listen.

> Your words make hope spring in my heart 9
> even as I endure unmitigated anguish.
> You console me: my right arm consoles me as well,
> pulsing in quivering anticipation.

MĀṆAVAKA : Can a Brāhmaṇā's words ever prove false?

(The king waits with renewed hope. In the meantime Urvaśī glides in by the skyway down to earth dressed in deep blue as an abhisārikā with Citralekhā accompanying her.)

URVAŚĪ (*looking down at herself*): My dearest friend, Citralekhā, how do I look in my abhisārikā dress, wearing just a few pearls and dressed and veiled all in blue silk?

CITRALEKHĀ: I have no words to describe the impression your make. But I can tell you what I am thinking, which is: "Now if only I were Purūrava."

URVAŚĪ: Dear friend, the god who maddens all with love commands you to take me quickly to the place where that wonderfully handsome beloved of mine lives.

CITRALEKHĀ: Why, look down; here we are at your beloved's mansion that appears to be Kailāsa's peak brought down here to earth.

URVAŚĪ: Good, now use your powers to find out where he is, the thief who has stolen my heart; tell me exactly what he is doing.

CITRALEKHĀ (*meditates closing her eyes; speaks to herself*): Let me first tease her a bit. (*aloud*) Well, my friend, I see him in a spot most appropriate to the enjoyment of love's pleasures, experiencing the ecstasies of happiness as his deepest desires are fulfilled by union with the beloved of his dreams.

Urvaśī is in deep despair.

CITRALEKHĀ: O, you silly girl! How can you entertain thoughts of his union with some other woman?

URVAŚĪ (*sighing deeply*): O, my untrusting heart, it cannot but entertain doubts.

CITRALEKHĀ (*glancing around*): Here he is, the Royal Sage, seated with his bosom friend on the terrace of the Maṇiharmya Palace. Let us go closer.

Both descend from the sky.

PURŪRAVA : Ah! My dearest friend. How the anguish of love's passion swells inordinately as night falls.

URVAŚĪ: My heart trembles fearful, not knowing whom he is referring to. So, let us first conceal ourselves and overhear the drift of their conversation until our doubts are dispelled.

CITRALEKHĀ: As you wish, my dear.

MĀṆAVAKA: Then, why not enjoy these moonbeams filled with ambrosia.

PURŪRAVA: My dear friend, my sickness cannot be cured by remedies such as these.

> No bed strewn with freshly-opened blossoms, 10
> or refreshing moonbeams can cool my fevered limbs;
> no fragrant cream of sandal wood of the Malaya hills
> applied all over the body,
> no strings of gems cool to the touch
> can allay the fever brought on by the mind-born god.
> Only the touch of that celestial woman
> can remove love's pain; or.........

URVAŚĪ: Who is the other?

PURŪRAVA: ..... sweet talk of her in quiet solitude can lighten it.

URVAŚĪ: Ah! My heart, now you have been richly rewarded for abandoning me and transferring your allegiance.

MĀṆAVAKA: Yes, indeed. It is the same with me. So long as I do not obtain that delicious dish Śikhariṇī[36] topped by mango slices, I console myself by praying for them, reciting their names.

PURŪRAVA: But you can obtain this dish.

MĀṆAVAKA: And you too, Sir, will obtain Urvaśī shortly.

PURŪRAVA: My dear friend, I think....

CITRALEKHĀ: Listen to that, you who are hard to please; listen to that.

MĀṆAVAKA: What?

PURŪRAVA:

As the chariot jolted grinding to a halt, 11
shoulder pressed against shoulder, hers against mine.
In all my body that one part only is blessed indeed.
The rest drags on, a burden to the earth.

CITRALEKHĀ: My friend, why are you still holding back?

URVAŚĪ (*quickly moves close to the king*): Friend, Citralekhā, here I stand right before him; yet he remains indifferent.

CITRALEKHĀ (*smiling*): You really are impatient; you have forgotten to remove the veiling charm that makes you invisible.

(*a voice is heard offstage*) This way, Your Highness, come this way.

Everyone listens attentively. Urvaśī and her friend are disappointed.

MĀṆAVAKA: A..ha...a..ha...... Here comes the Queen. Control your tongue, my friend. Be careful what you say.

PURŪRAVA: You too, Māṇavaka. Not a clue as to what is on our minds.

URVAŚĪ: Ah! Citralekhā, my friend, what do we do now?

CITRALEKHĀ: Don't get so excited. We are invisible. From the way she is dressed the Queen Consort of the Royal Sage appears to be observing a vow and has been fasting. So, she is not likely to stay long here.

Queen Auśīnarī enters with her attendants carrying various materials for worship.

AUŚĪNARĪ: (*gazing at the moon*) Nipuṇikā, dear girl, the glorious deer-marked lord now glows with such splendour in conjunction with Rohiṇī, his beloved consort.

NIPUṆIKĀ: In my opinion, His Majesty with Your Royal Highness beside him looks even more splendid. (*they turn around*)

MĀṆAVAKA (*looking closely*): Her Ladyship, the Queen looks enchanting this evening. Whether she comes with a gift of sweets for my benediction; or whether under the guise of observing a vow she comes to erase the insult she offered you, rejecting your entreaties, I cannot say.

PURŪRAVA (*smiling*): Both reasons fit; however the latter is more likely, because Her Ladyship appears:

All in white, in fine gleaming silks 12
adorned with a few jewels, auspicious[37]
tokens of a married woman's good fortune;
a few fine blades of sacred dūrvā grass
are woven into the curls fringing her forehead;
free from anger and jealous pride
as befitting the observer of a sacred vow,
her very deportment speaks of gracious reconciliation.

AUŚĪNARĪ: Glory! Glory to my revered lord!

ATTENDANTS: Glory! Glory to our great lord!

MĀṆAVAKA: Welcome, my lady.

PURŪRAVA (*takes her by the hand and seats her*): Most welcome to our queen.

URVAŚĪ: The title of "Queen" sits most regally on her, Citralekhā, for in the splendour of majesty she is in no way inferior to Śacī herself, Indra's Queen.

CITRALEKHĀ: True enough; I am happy to hear you say this without a trace of jealousy.

AUŚĪNARĪ: I am observing a special vow that concerns my revered lord. May I be pardoned for inconveniencing you, my lord, taking up an hour or so of your time?

PURŪRAVA: No, no, my queen, do not speak such words. Where does the question of inconvenience come in when you are doing me a favour?

MĀṆAVAKA: May such "inconveniences" occur more frequently for they bring with them gifts of delicious sweets.

PURŪRAVA: May I know the name of our queen's special vow?

The Queen glances at Nipuṇikā.

NIPUṆIKĀ: My lord, "Propitiation of the Beloved" is its name.

PURŪRAVA (*looking at the Queen*): If that is so, let me say this:

To wear out a body delicate as a lotus stalk 13
with the rigours of a vow such as this
is quite uncalled for, my gracious lady.
Does this poor slave who waits in eager anticipation
of your gracious favour, and for that only,
have to be propitiated?

URVAŚĪ: Great indeed is his regard for the Queen.

CITRALEKHĀ: O, really! Don't be so naive. When these sophisticated and highly refined gentlemen fall in love with another woman they become extremely courteous and gallant to their wives.

AUŚĪNARĪ (*smiling*): Surely it must be the immediate effect of my vow that prompts my revered lord to treat me with such kind courtesy.

MĀṆAVAKA: No further protestations, Your Honour. They might spoil the good effects of the neatly-turned phrases already spoken.

AUŚĪNARĪ: Girls, bring the materials for worship here so that I might start the rites of adoration of the Moon and offer puja at his bright moonbeam feet....these moonbeams that now fall on the terrace of the Maṇiharmya Palace.

ATTENDANTS: As Your Majesty commands (*bring the necessary puja articles*) Here are the materials for the puja, Your Majesty: flowers, perfumes, sandalwood cream and all the other requisites.

AUŚĪNARĪ (*does the puja rites offering worship to the moonbeams falling on the terrace*) : Nipuṇikā, here, take these sweets that are part of the offerings to divinity to the noble Māṇavaka,[d] dear girl.

NIPUṆIKĀ: As your Majesty commands. Noble Māṇavaka, the Queen offers these sweets to you, Sir.

MĀṆAVAKA (*accepting the dish of sweets*): May Your Ladyship be blessed in every way! May the observance of your sacred vow bear rich fruit![38]

AUŚĪNARĪ: My beloved lord, please come here.

PURŪRAVA : Here I am, my lady.

AUŚĪNARĪ (*goes through the acts of ritual worship of the king. Then folding her hands bows low to him*) I here invoke the divine couple, the hare-marked divinity, the Moon and the star Rohiṇī now in conjunction. Let them bear witness that I am propitiating my lord. From this day

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d. Some variant readings include the Chamberlain as well, which seems very appropriate.

on I solemnly declare that a bond of affection[e] will be created between me and her, whom my dear husband yearns for so deeply and who in return longs for union with my husband.

URVAŚĪ: I fail to fathom the true meaning of her words. However, my heart feels light, filled with confidence.

CITRALEKHĀ: Well, my friend, this noble lady, a truly loyal wife to her husband has spoken out of her magnanimity and given her consent to your union with her husband, the king. So there seems to be no obstacle in the way of your happiness.

MĀṆAVAKA: (*aside*) The fisherman empty-handed and disappointed to see the fish elude his grasp can only pat himself on the back for being noble and sparing the life of the fish! (*aloud*) My lady, is my lord, the king, so dear to you?[f]

AUŚĪNARĪ: You fool! I wish to relieve my husband of his unhappiness even at the cost of sacrificing my own happiness. Judge from that for yourself whether he is "so dear" to me or not.

PURŪRAVA:

Yours is the power to give me to another; 14
yours too the power to make me your slave;[g]
but, my lady who is so deeply troubled by fears,
I assert that I am not what you think I am.

AUŚĪNARĪ: You may, or you may not be. However, I have completed my vow, the "Propitiation of the Beloved" as it should be. Girls, come, let us go. (*prepares to leave*).

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e. Variant reading only says that the queen will not oppose the union of the king and Urvaśī; no mention is made of a 'bond of affection' between herself and Urvaśī.

f. Alternate version of this important comment is as follows: Māṇavaka says, "My lady, how dear is our lord, the King, to you"?

g. Alternative versions of v. 14. 1, 2 are found, especially of the second quarter of the verse: "hartum eva vā dāsam" or "kartum eva dāsam" (Velankar: S.A. ed.). I follow Velankar.

I give the alternate renderings for the lines.

i) "Yours the power to give me away to another;
yours too the power to keep me back, a slave.

ii) Yours is the power to give me, your slave
to another; and the power to take me back.

iii) Yours is the power to make me a slave
to another; or, to take me back.

iv) Yours is the power to give me to another;
yours the power to possess me as your slave.

PURŪRAVA: Oh, my darling, how am I being propitiated when you are abandoning me and leaving?

AUŚĪNARĪ: My noble lord, I have never transgressed the sacred rules of my vows. (*exits with her attendants*)

URVAŚĪ: Citralekhā, my dear friend, the Royal Sage loves his wife deeply. But, I cannot call my heart back.

CITRALEKHĀ: Why, have you lost hope, and think of turning back[h] ?

PURŪRAVA (*resumes his seat*): Ah! Māṇavaka, my best friend, the queen has not gone too far.

MĀṆAVAKA: Oh! Sir, you may say whatever you wish to say. Her Ladyship of her own accord has given you up as incorrigible, just as a physician a patient incurable.

PURŪRAVA: If only Urvaśī.....................

URVAŚĪ: ....could have her dearest wish fulfilled today!

PURŪRAVA:

....my beloved, though hidden from sight 15
would let the sweet tinkling sounds of her anklets
fall on my ears.

Or, coming softly from behind
cover my eyes tightly
with the lovely lotus-palms of her hands.
Or, if she would alight here on this terrace
but hold back through sudden fear
or bashfulness; and by force
be brought step by step to my side
by her very resourceful friend!

URVAŚĪ: Dear Citralekhā, I shall now make his fantasies come true.

Approaches the king from behind and closes his eyes.

Citralekhā makes a sign to the vidūṣaka.

PURŪRAVA (*feels Urvaśī's touch*): Māṇavaka, my good friend, it is she, the lady with magnificent thighs, born from the sage Nārāyaṇa's thigh!

MĀṆAVAKA: How do you know that it is her?

PURŪRAVA: What's so difficult to know?

MĀṆAVAKA: How can you tell? How do you know?

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h. Alternate reading: Citralekhā: Are you such a foolish girl, giving him up to make yourself a figure of ridicule?

PURŪRAVA: What's there to know?

My body tormented by the Bodiless One 16
would not feel such bliss from the touch of another hand.
The night-blooming white lotus
sighs in happiness and opens in beauty
touched by the cool beams of the moon,
not by the rays of the burning Sun.

URVAŚĪ (*removes her hands from the king's eyes and comes a little forward*): Glory! Glory to the great king.[j]

PURŪRAVA: My beautiful lady, welcome and welcome again. (*seats her beside him on the same seat.*)

CITRALEKHĀ: Has my good friend found happiness?

PURŪRAVA: Yes, happiness has come to me this instant.

URVAŚĪ: The great king has been given to me by the Queen. Therefore I come to him as his beloved to be united in body with him. Do not therefore judge me as a forward woman, taking liberties, dear Citralekhā.

MĀṆAVAKA: So...you two have been right here all this time, since sunset; is that so?

PURŪRAVA (*gazing on Urvaśī*):

You feel free to take liberties with my body 17
claiming your right by the Queen's consent.
Whose permission did you ask for
in the first place, to steal my heart?

CITRALEKHĀ: Dear friend, she has no answer to that but I have a request to make of you.

PURŪRAVA: You have my attention, my lady.

CITRALEKHĀ: At the close of spring when summer follows, it is my turn to wait upon the divinity, Sun. And you, dear friend, should attend on my friend in such a way that she will not sigh with longing for her home in Svarga.

MĀṆAVAKA: Lady, what is there in Svarga to long for? They neither eat or drink there. They only sit around with staring eyes unblinking, mocking fishes.

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j. A variant reading has this:
Urvaśī: Ah! It seems as if this pair of hands are formed of adamant; I cannot remove them (*she keeps her own eyes wide open. The king removes her hands from his eyes and turns her around to face him*). Glory! Glory to the great king!

PURŪRAVA: Gracious lady :

> The pleasures of Svarga defy description; 18
> how can anyone be made to forget them?
> But Purūrava is now her bond slave.
> No other woman has a claim on him.

CITRALEKHĀ: Sir, I am grateful for this. Urvaśī, dearest friend. Be brave, let me go.

URVAŚĪ (*closely embraces Citralekhā*): You won't forget me, will you, dearest friend?

CITRALEKHĀ (*smiling*): Now that you are united with your beloved, it is really I who have to beg this of you.

MĀṆAVAKA: By the grace of good fortune you are now happy, your wishes having been fulfilled.

PURŪRAVA: This indeed, is the pinnacle of good fortune for[k] me. Listen:

> Not the sole, undisputed possession 19
> of the royal, white umbrella, symbol
> of supreme sovereignty over the wide earth;
> not my edicts graven on stones illuminated[m]
> by the lustre of jewelled diadems of great princes,
> my vassals kneeling have I felt so fulfilled, my friend,
> as on this day kneeling at Urvaśī's feet,
> appointed in endearing service to do her will.

URVAŚĪ: What words do I have more pleasing than these your words to respond?

PURŪRAVA:

> 20
> Now that I hold you close in love,
> what was once exceeding harsh, cruel in its fury
> becomes now agreeable and soothing,
> my beautiful lady.
> Those same moonbeams are delightful
> drenching my body with coolness;
> those same arrows of love, maddening,
> now fill my heart with gladness serene.

URVAŚĪ: I have greatly wronged the great king by delaying so long.

PURŪRAVA: O, no, no; don't say that,

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k. Variant reading:
Pururava : She, is indeed, my great good fortune.

m. Not the royal footstool, symbol of glory.

The happiness that follows sorrow 21
tastes sweetest.
The tree's shade is paradisal
to him who comes scorched by the sun's heat.

MĀṆAVAKA: Listen, my good friend; we have fully enjoyed the rays of the moon most delightful in the early hours of the night. It is time to enter the bedchamber.

PURŪRAVA: Well, then show your friend the way.

MĀṆAVAKA: This way my lady, come this way.

All turn around.

PURŪRAVA: My beautiful beloved, now at this moment I have one request.

URVAŚĪ: What might that be?

PURŪRAVA:

When my heart's fond desires seemed unattainable, 22
the long nights grew a hundred times longer.
If now this night of our union would linger,
my love with fine arching brows, I would feel most blessed.

Exit all

ACT FOUR

PRELUDE

A lyric in Prakrit named ākshptikā is sung to announce the entry of Citralekhā and Sahajanyā

A SINGER:

Parted from her dearest friend,
heartbroken she sits
weeping, sorrowful,
with her companion
by the shores of a lake
where lotuses bloom
touched by the ray-fingers
of the morning sun.

Citralekhā and Sahajanyā enter during the song, dancing and clapping their bands: they pause; Citralekhā takes a few steps forward using the deliberate gait known as dvipadī.

CITRALEKHĀ (*sings turning to each of the four quarters*) :

Consumed by sorrow
for a companion
dearly-loved,
a pair of wild geese,
tender-hearted
lament
by the lake,
their eyes trembling with welling tears.

SAHAJANYĀ (*looking anxiously at Citralekhā*): Why, my dear friend, your face... how wan it appears, like a fading lotus..... revealing some deep-seated sorrow in your heart. Tell me the cause of your sorrow, let me share your pain.

CITRALEKHĀ: Listen, my dear friend, when it was my turn in the prescribed order set down for all Apsarās to perform the rites of adoration at the feet of the glorious sun-god, I was at one time seized by an overpowering longing for Urvaśī's company; I missed her so much.

SAHAJANYĀ: O, I understand that only too well, knowing the strong bond of affection between the two of you. Well, go on; what happened then?

CITRALEKHĀ: I started wondering how things were with Urvaśī. To find out, I entered into deep meditation. Making use of my powers of divination, I could see everything clearly. A terrible misfortune had occurred.

SAHAJANYĀ (*troubled*): A misfortune? What sort of misfortune?

CITRALEKHĀ (*deeply distressed*): Urvaśī had gone to the Gandhamādana Forests to enjoy herself, taking with her the royal sage, her partner in love-sport, who had already divested himself of the cares of state and placed the yoke of responsibilities of governing the empire on the shoulders of his ministers.

SAHAJANYĀ: What fabulous enjoyment it must have been indeed... in such a place... created for the pleasures of love. Well, then what happened?

CITRALEKHĀ: In the groves there on Mandākinī's banks a young girl named Udayavatī, daughter of a Vidyādhara noble, was playing heaping the sands into little play-hillocks. The royal sage seems to have gazed long and somewhat ardently at the lovely young girl. Urvaśī noticed it. And she flew into a frightful rage.

SAHAJANYĀ: What must be will be! Love that is so intense as to become an obsessive passion can turn into maddening jealousy. Then what

happened?

CITRALEKHĀ: Scorning her noble lord's humble entreaties, Urvaśī rushed away from his side. The dark power of our guru's curse had already begun acting on her mind unsettling it. In a blind fury she rushed headlong into the sacred grove of the god Kumāra[39] forbidden to women, forgetting the divine interdiction. Instantly she was metamorphosed into a climbing vine right at the edge of the grove.

SAHAJANYĀ (*sadly*): Insurmountable is the course of Destiny. How tragic is the Fate that has overtaken such a love. But tell me, how is the Royal Sage taking it?

CITRALEKHĀ: Night and day he wanders in those very same forests searching for his beloved. (*Glancing up at the skies*) Ah! Do you see that, Sahajanyā? The rain clouds are gathering. And now the king will become subject to even greater misery. For even those who are happy feel restless at the sight of rain clouds.

A jambhalikā sung behind the scenes.

A SINGER:

Lapped in bitter grief 3
for a best-beloved companion
a pair of wild geese
lament
bathed in a flow of tears
never-ending.

SAHAJANYĀ: Listen, dear Citralekhā, let me say this; I truly believe that persons who are uncommonly noble and handsome like this pair will not be subject to extreme misery for long. Some favourable turn or other in their fortunes is bound to occur to bring about their reunion. (*looking towards the east*) Now come along, friend: it's time for us to attend to our rites of adoration to the glorious divinity, the Sun, now rising.

A khaṇḍadhārā is sung.

A SINGER:

Heart burning, 4
mind tense with foreboding,
desperately yearning
to see her beloved companion,
a wild goose wanders
desolate
among the full-blown lotuses

on a lake
enchanting.

SAHAJANYĀ: Listen, friend, do you think some means might be found to effect the reunion of these lovers?

CITRALEKHĀ: What means are there? Except the Saṅgamamaṇi[a], the gem sprung from the bright red juice applied to the feet of the goddess Gaurī?

Exit Citralekhā and Sahajanyā.

End of Prelude

Entrance song (prāveśikī ākṣiptikā) to announce the entry of King Purūrava.

A noble tusker, lord of the herd 5
enduring separation from his beloved
enters the grove
changed in appearance
by stark madness,
the forepart of his massive frame
adorned with flowers
and tender leaf-sprouts of trees.

King Purūrava enters in the dress and manner of a mad man, looking around with vacant gaze.

PURŪRAVA (*looking into the distance at some imaginary object*): Hey there! Stop! You vile fellow! Stay! Where are you carrying off my beloved? Alas! What misery! He has leapt off the hilltop into the sky. Now, he is showering volleys of arrows at me.

Picking up a clod he rushes forward to hurl it; then stops, takes a few steps forward in a deliberate manner and looks up at the sky.

SINGER:

6
Grief for his beloved
embedded deeply in his heart
a wild goose in the prime of youth,
flutters his wings
on the lake
faint of heart
his eyes quivering with fear.

a. The gem of reunion.

PURŪRAVA (*looking carefully*):

This is a newly-sprung rain cloud, ready, girt for action, 7
not some insolent fiend who prowls at night;
this is the rainbow of Indra, lord of rain and thunder,
not an archer's bow, bent, drawn to its full extent;
and this is a sharp, driving shower of rain,
not a volley of keen, wounding arrows;
and this is the lightning, glittering
like a streak of gold on a touchstone
it is not, alas, my beloved Urvaśī.

The king falls to the ground in a faint; he gets up presently and takes a few steps forward in the deliberate dvipada gait.

PURŪRAVA (*sighing deeply*):

I was certain it was some fiend 8
stalking women in the dark night
carrying away my doe-eyed love;
but it is only a dark rain cloud
newly-risen, lightning-streaked,
pouring down shower upon shower.

The king addresses the rain cloud; then sings a carcarī.

PURŪRAVA (*angrily expostulating*):

Hey! You there! Oh! Rain cloud ! 9
Control your rage at once.
I command you!
How pitiably have you drowned the beauty of face
of Space in all directions!
Pelting her with unending streams of rain!
Now stop!
Wandering over this whole wide earth
as I do, if I should come upon my beloved,
you may then do your worst against me,
and I shall bear it patiently, I swear.

I am warning the fellow.

A carcarī follows.

PURŪRAVA (*reflecting sadly*): Where, O, where could she have gone, my love whose thighs are rounded, soft and smooth like fresh, young plantain stems.

SINGER:

The Tree of Paradise[40] dances 10
many ways in sheer delight,

a soft breeze blowing through its foliage;
the wealth of twining twigs of tender sprouts
waving, trembling, quivering;
intoxicated by the fragrance of its flowers,
honey bees murmur melodies in accompaniment,
while koels play flutes to complete the ensemble.

The king dances.

PURŪRAVA:

Could she be here, remaining hidden from view 11
through her magic powers, out of anger?
But she cannot be angry for long.
Could she have perhaps flown back to Svarga?
But then, her heart melts with tender love for me.
Then again, could the enemies of the Devas
have abducted her, before my very eyes?
O, no, that can never be;
they are powerless before me;
yet, she has vanished, completely
from the range of my vision.
What kind of cruel decree of Fate is this?

The king woebegone casts his eyes in all directions and exclaims piteously.

Oh! Misery! Misery! When fortune turns her back on one, sorrow follows close upon sorrow. Just think upon it!

PURŪRAVA:

Deserted by my beloved, here I am, 12
reeling under Sorrow's burden unbearable.
And at this very moment I see rising
new rain clouds to relieve Summer's punishing heat.
Days will now be delightful,
and my misery a more, gruelling ordeal.

I must go in search of her.

After reciting these words[41]*, a bhinnaka is sung.*

SINGER:

Desolated by sorrow from the beloved's absence, 13
wasted by the pain of separation,
nerveless and excessively languid,
the noble tusker, lord of the herd
moves around with feeble gait on the hills
in the forests resplendent with flowers.

The king dances.

PURŪRAVA (*laughs*): Why do I bear so patiently the anguish growing in my heart? For what reason? Even the ancient sages declare this maxim: 'The King rules over Time'. Then.....why should I not forbid the coming of the rains? Ah! No! Consider this: these signs of the season of rains are the sole insignia of my royalty at present. How? Mark this:

Filigreed with the lightning's gleaming 14
threads of gold,
this deep-blue cloud is now my gorgeous canopy of state;
these swaying sprays of flowers are now royal chowries
that nicula trees are waving softly over me;
blue-necked peacocks celebrating Summer's close
with shrill, joyful cries are bards singing my praises;
these hills down whose ridges stream the water
of life-sustaining showers that keep a steady course
like caravans, are merchants proffering streams of wealth.

Oh! Well! What use are such descriptions of my present pomp and ceremony. Mere boasting! Let me pursue the quest for my beloved lost in these forests.

A Khaṇḍaka follows:

SINGER:

Heart-broken, sick with desire.
yearning to see his beloved once again, 15
the noblest of tuskers,
once the dreaded scourge of his foes
now hurriedly rushes around, bewildered
by his failure to protect his beloved.

A carcarī dance follows.

O, peacock flaunting your magnificent train! 16
I beseech you, tell me about her;
wandering here in this forest did you see her
That beloved of mine? Now, listen to what I say.
Her face is lovely as the moon; her gait,
languorous as the gait of a wild goose.
You will recognize her by these very signs
I say to you, my friend.

The king sits down after dancing the carcarī; and makes a namaste. Then he glances around looking at the landscape.

Ah! All this around me..... this landscape only serves to whet my resolve to search for her. Mark this:

These red-veined blossoms quivering with rain drops 17
on this tender, new kandali
remind me of her lovely eyes
trembling in anger with unshed tears.

How can I find out which way Her Ladyship went?

PURŪRAVA:

If the feet of that exquisitely-formed lady 18
had touched the earth, a line of charming prints
sunken deep at the heels from the heaviness of her hips,
and marked by lines of bright red *ālakta* tinting her soles,
would be seen clearly on the soft sandy soil
in these woodland clearings wet with showers of rain.

The king does a carcarī; turning and gazing all around, he is filled with delight.

PURŪRAVA: Ah! Here it is! Just the sort of clue to enable me to trace the path the angry lady took. See!

The stole that had veiled her breasts lies there;
deep blue-green as a parrot's belly and stained with teardrops
that first fell on her lips and stole their redness.
No doubt it slipped down and fell as its hold loosened
while the lady with a sunken navel
rushed with faltering steps stumbling on her way.

Good. Let me pick it up. (*he rushes forward; then looks carefully*)

PURŪRAVA (*tearfully*): Oh! No! What's this! It is only a patch of fresh green grass with ladybirds scattered on it. (*lamenting*) Where in this desolate forest can I get any news of my beloved? (*looking ahead*) Ah! There! Perched on that moss-grown rock, rain-drenched and exhaling vapours, I see there:

A peacock, his crest buffeted 20
by sharp gusts of wind coming at him;
stretching up his neck, high, he watches the clouds
while his piercing cries of rapture
kekā-kekā-kekā, come rolling
swelling from his throat.

I shall question him. (*approaches the bird*)

O, bright blue-necked bird, tell me, have you seen her, 21
my beloved, here in this forest?
The lady with lovely, long, liquid eyes
and well-shaped, proudly raised neck?

She is well worth your seeing as your eyes
with their striking white corners dart around.

What's this? Without a reply he has begun to dance with such joy. And what may be the reason for it? (*meditating*): Ah! Yes! I know why, don't I?

Now that my beloved has vanished from sight, 22
his iridescent tail-feathers dark-blue and glossy
like a lightning-sparked rain cloud gleaming,
and ruffled gently by a soft breeze stirring,
suffers no rival at the moment as he knows well.
But, if she were here, her luxuriant mass of hair
woven with bright blossoms, falling loose
dishevelled by rapturous love play,
then, what would he do? Would he compete?
Would he dare display his gorgeous plumage?

No. Let's leave him alone. I shall not make inquiries of this creature that delights in another's misery. (*walks some paces*) Here is a cuckoo sitting on a branch in a thicket of rose-apple trees, her passion roused to fever-pitch seeing rain clouds that mark the end of summer. Of all birds we hear she is the cleverest. Why should I not make my inquiries of this bird?

Dances a carcarī, looking up, watching the cuckoo.

A khuraka dance follows.

SINGER:

Retreating into a quiet grove 23
haunted by Vidyādharas,
a flood of tears gushing out from grief,
happiness banished from his heart,
the lord of tuskers wanders
measuring the sky with his eyes.

A carcarī dance follows.

PURŪRAVA: Hello there! Hello there!

Dear cuckoo! Prattling idly, 24
flying freely!
where you will, as you please.
If you've seen her, my sweet love
in Indra's Nandana Groves, tell me.
Tell me truly, my sweet cuckoo!

The king dances to this; falls to his knees and moves forward on his knees to the tune of the balantikā.

PURŪRAVA: My lady,

Impassioned lovers call you love's messenger, 25
expert in stratagems to humble the pride of women.
You are an unfailing weapon.
Bring my beloved to my arms, melodious songster;
or, lead me straight to her, whereever she might be,
lead me quickly to the one I adore.

You said something to me, my lady? Ah! "Why did she desert a man so deeply in love with her, and go away?" Is that what you asked? Listen, lady.

Enraged she is, no doubt. 26
Though, I cannot recall
giving her any cause for rage;
no, not even once.
Tyrannous is the dominion
exercised by wives over husbands.
It does not wait for true devotion to falter
but lashes out in fury.

See! How now? She has dropped the conversation! Busy in her own affairs, it seems!

"Another's pain however great does not hurt": 27
How aptly said! For this bird,
unconcerned for me drowning in despair,
coolly ignores my piteous plea;
and in the blindness of selfish pride
she turns to this noblest of rose-apple trees
to suck the sweetness of its ripening fruit
as if it were the lower lip of her loving mate.

Even so, I am not angry with her because her voice is sweet like my beloved's voice.

The king turns a little to the left; looks up at the sky.

PURŪRAVA: Be happy, lady; and I shall be on my way.

He rises from his knees; using dvipadī steps he takes a turn round the stage.

PURŪRAVA: Aha! What is this sound? Here on my right I hear the tinkling of anklets...the sound of my beloved's footsteps? Let me follow this

sound. (*takes another turn round the stage*)

SINGER:

Bereft of his beloved, faded are his looks; 28
pale eyes overflowing with endless tears;
limbs burning with the rising fever of pain,
even greater anguish splitting his mind;
tottering blinded by unbearable grief,
the lord of tuskers wanders in the grove.

The king repeats these six lines in the Kakubha mode of singing; then moves forward in the dvipadikā gait and looks all around.

SINGER:

Parted from his dearly-loved mate, 29
and burning in the flames of sorrow,
his eyes welling with hot tears,
the noblest of tuskers wanders
in deep distress.

The king sits down, sings a carcarī.

PURŪRAVA: Alas! Alas! Oh! Misery! Ah! No, no!

These are not the tones of anklets tinkling; 30
these are the bell-tones of swans calling;
at the sight of skies dark with rain clouds
their hearts fill with yearning for Lake Mānasa.

So be it. Anyhow, so long as these birds do not fly away from the lake I can still hope to get news of my beloved Urvaśī. (*approaches the swans using the balantikā gait*). Hey! King of Birds! Listen to me.

Your flight to Mānasa's lake can wait for later; 31
drop the lotus-stalks you are busy gathering
to sustain you on your long journey;
you may gather them once again.
But first lift me out of the sea of sorrow
by providing news of my beloved.
Noble persons value helping others
over looking after their own interests.

He looks up at me as if to say: "My heart yearns to fly to Mānasa. I have not seen your beloved."

The king sits down, sings a carcarī.

Hey there! Listen! O, swan! 32a
Why do you hide the truth?

He dances to this; then rises.

PURŪRAVA:

If you had not seen my love with arching eyebrows 33ab
passing by the shore of the lake, O swan,
how is it that you've copied to perfection
the elegance of her walk shaped by voluptuous passion, O, thief!

Watching your gait, I have seen it all. 32b

The king walks towards the swan with the carcarī gait; then bowing with a namaste, speaks.

O swan, give me back my darling, 34
the adored one whose gait you've stolen.
A thief caught with a part of stolen goods on him
is charged under the law to restore all that he stole.

Where, O swan, did you learn it, 33cd
this languorous gait that you covet,
if you did not see her,
my love with full, swaying hips?

The king sings a carcarī again, then repeats the stanza 'O, swan, give me back........' chanting it and accompanying it with dvipadī steps, then laughs.

PURŪRAVA: Look, look; he's flown off out of fear, thinking: 'He is the King and he will punish thieves' (*turns around*) Now here is a cakravāka[49] with his beloved. Let me ask him about my beloved.

A kutilikā follows performed on the back portion of the stage; it is a sequence of dance and song; a dance, mallaghaṭī, done to the accompaniment of only drums, and ending with a carcarī.

SINGER (*at the back of the stage, accompanying the kutilikā*):

Murmur of leaves rustling— 35a
birds fluting—
like bells tinkling—
how enchanting!

SINGER (*accompanying a mallaghaṭī*):

Tender leaves sprouting— 35b
on choicest trees
blossoming—
how beautiful!

SINGER (*sings the carcarī*):

The lord of tuskers, circling 35cd
aimless, roams in the grove

parted from his love
maddened
bewildered

The king dances in two tempos, slow and fast, dvilaya; followed by a carcarī.

O bird, bright yellow and saffron, 36
shaped like a chariot-wheel,
tell me not you saw her not,
my happy love, bringer of good fortune ,
sporting gaily by the lake
on a lovely spring morning.

The king moves closer to the cakravāka, dancing a carcarikā and falls on his knees.

PURŪRAVA: I shall ask him:

Bereft of her whose hips are orbs rounded 37
beautifully like a chariot's wheels,
this royal warrior who mounts
a great chariot of war stands here,
grieving, hundreds of swift chariots of desires
wheeling round him, racing through his mind.
O bird whose form is sweetly rounded
like a chariot's wheel, he asks you.

What's this? The bird repeats saying "Who-oo- Who-oo"[b] Is it possible? He does not know of me, it seems. I am he:

Whose grandparents are the Sun and Moon, 38
my mother's parent and my father's;
and more honoured am I, chosen
lord and husband of their own free will
by two women divine; I am,
lord of the Earth and Urvaśī's lord.

PURŪRAVA: What's this again! He is silent. All right then; I'll reproach him roundly.

If your soul mate is hidden from your view 39
only by the petals of lotuses on the lake
you cry out in anguish, forlorn,
thinking she is far away from you, do you not?

---

b. Kaḥ, who? The interrogative pronoun in Sanskrit; the king hears the kak..kak..kak.. sound of cackling of the bird as kaḥ. kaḥ. understanding it as "who...who..."

So great a fear of separation haunts you
out of such deep love for her;
yet as I stand here before you desperate,
enduring the cruel reality of separation
from my beloved, you turn away coldly,
refusing even a hint of tidings of her.

Ah, well! It is my fate! The baleful influence of my stars that have reversed their courses. My fortunes have taken an evil turn. It's better that I leave this place and go elsewhere (*takes a step, then stops short*) Oh, no! Whatever may lie in store for me, I shall not leave just as yet. (*something has struck his fancy*)

This lotus with a bee within its heart 40
murmuring rapturously holds me back
because it resembles her lovely face
as she thrills with pleasure
and draws her breath in sharply
when I bite hard her lower lip passionately.

Well, I shall affectionately entreat this honeybee sitting pretty inside the lotus. Then I can leave without any regrets.

The king assumes a dance pose, the ardha-dvi-caturasraka.

SINGER:

The bond of their deep love 41[c]
severed all on a sudden,
the young swan on the lake
has no heart for passion's play.

The king moves a few steps in the "Square" position (caturasraka) and folds his hands in reverential greeting.

PURŪRAVA (*pleading*):

O, honey-gatherer, I beseech you— 42
tell me of my love with bewitching eyes—
Or—
(*observing the bee closely*)
you have not seen her at all, have you?
My lady of exquisite beauty?

---

c. Variant reading of v.41 conveys the direct opposite sense:
The sudden separation
brings on an upsurge of love.
The young swan on the lake
splashes in passion's pool.

If you had, and enjoyed
the fragrance of her sweet breath,
would you have found any pleasure
in the perfume breathed out by this white lotus?

Well then; let us be on our way

He steps round the stage in the dvipadikā gait.

PURŪRAVA (*looking around*): Ah! Here is the Lord of Tuskers resting his trunk on a Kadamba branch, with his beloved mate standing beside him. I may learn something about the whereabouts of *my* beloved from him.

A kutilikā followed by a mallaghaṭī.

SINGER (*accompanying the kutilikā*):

(*kutilikā*) Burning with anguish 43a
abandoned by his beloved
(*mallaghaṭī*) The lordly tusker roams 43b
in the grove
honeybees cluster round him
intoxicated by the scent
of streaming rut.

PURŪRAVA (*watching the elephants*): We should not be in a hurry; let him be at peace:

Let him first taste and enjoy the rich sap 44
sweet as wine, of the branch
bearing tender, fresh shoots broken off
and offered tenderly by his loving mate.

The king pauses for a while; then assuming the Sthanaka dance pose he looks at the tusker.

PURŪRAVA: Ah! He has finished his midday meal. Good. Now I can speak to him.

A carcarī dance.

PURŪRAVA:

Listen, noblest of tuskers 45
who fells the strongest trees
with light, playful strokes;
I ask you this; answer me straight.
Did you see my beloved pass by?
She whose radiant beauty, flawless;

far surpasses the brilliance
of the flawed, hare-marked moon?

The king takes two steps coming closer to the elephant.

PURŪRAVA:

O, noble tusker! Lord of the Herd! 46
Trumpeting furiously maddened by rut,
have you seen her, standing at a distance, radiant?
Among the loveliest women,enchanting;
she is the moon at its brightest.
Easy on the eye, blessed with youth everlasting,
dark hair dappled with sparkling-white jasmine buds.

The elephant trumpets; the king listening, thrills with delight.

PURŪRAVA: Ha! What supreme consolation this brings me! Hearing the deep resonant tones of his thundering voice! These sounds declare his recognition of my dearest beloved. Moreover, the strong kinship between us rouses in me great affection for him.

They proclaim me paramount o'er the mighty lords of the wide earth, 47
and name you, Your Honour, supreme lord of elephants.
Rut flows in rich profusion continuously from your temples;
I pour out lavish showers of gifts to my supplicants.
Among all the priceless gems of beautiful women,
Urvaśī is my best-beloved, as this your dear mate
by your side, the choicest in the whole herd, is yours.
In all respects we are alike; but may you never
endure the pain of separation from your beloved.

Live happily, Sir; we take our leave and go on our way. (*turning around, the king glances to one side*) Aha! How beautiful is this mountain named Surabhi-Kandara[d]. It is the favourite haunt of Apsarās. If only I could find my sweetheart of exquisite loveliness here, in the valley at the foot of this mountain!· (*walks round the stage looking around*). Alas! Alas! What blinding darkness! Never mind. I can still see by the light of the flashing lightning. O, no! Misery! Even the dark rain clouds are not lit up by the thousand glittering streaks of lightning. Surely, this must be the bitter fruit of my sins. Even so, I will not leave this place without first asking this high mountain for news of my beloved Urvaśī.

---

d. Fragrant cave.

A khandikā follows.

SINGER:

Sheltering in the dense grove, 48
a wild boar, determined,
tears open the earth
with hard hoof out-stretched.
He roves about here and there
intent on his own purpose.

PURŪRAVA (*addresses the mountain*):

Broad-flanked mountain, did a certain lovely lady, 49
with smoothly planed flanks and fine limbs sculpted
in exquisite symmetry resort to your groves,
embraced as his own by Bodiless Love?

Imagine; he remains silent. I daresay that from this distance he can barely hear me. Very well then. I shall go near and ask him again.

A carcarī is danced.

With crystalline rocks sparkling 50
washed bright by foaming cascades!
With peaks wearing crests
of many-coloured blossoms!
Enchanting with Kinnaras
singing melodious songs!
O, Earth-Supporting Mountain!
Hear me! Reveal my beloved.

The king wheels around and does a namaste in reverential greeting.

Great Lord of all Earth-Supporting Mountains! 51
Have you seen that lady lovely in every limb?
Of exotic beauty, parted from me,
resting somewhere at the edges of this enchanting grove?

Cupping his ear the king listens.

PURŪRAVA (*exhilarated*): Ah! Yes, I hear him, echoing my very words, saying to me "I saw her". May your Honour hear words much more pleasant. Well then. Where is she? My sweetheart? I shall look for her. (*he hears his own words repeated backstage*)

The king looks around in despair and speaks sadly.

Alas! Alas! These are my very own words thrown back at me from the mouth of the cave. (*he faints away and falls down; regains consciousness; speaks dejectedly sitting up*) O, how tired I am; so weary.

I had better sit for a while by the banks of this mountain stream and enjoy the cool breeze wafted over its waters. Though this stream looks muddied, frothing, churned up by recent rains, my mind is filled with exhilaration watching it. For :

The stream's rippling wavelets — 52
her arching eyebrows;
birds in a row rocking
on swirling waters, calling excited —
golden bells sounding, trembling,
strung on her jewelled belt;
her robes in disarray, loosening
as she hurries in anger, agitated,
gathering, clutching them with one hand —
foam on white water scattering,
dragging, drawn along.
This stream going on its wayward course
stumbling on like her
brooding time and again over my wrongdoing,
unable to endure her jealous rage —
is in truth my Urvaśī transformed.

Well; I shall plead with her. (*bows humbly folding his hands to do a namaste*) *A kutilikā is performed.*

Beloved above all else, be gracious; 53
enchanting stream, let your rage be appeased.
The birds in your world, O, goddess,
calling in excitement are merciless.
A fine brave stag, full of longing
stays on your banks, celestial stream!
Clusters of large black bees buzzing
swarm on your banks, O, goddess!

A carcarī is danced.

SINGER:

The rains, first of the season, descend on earth 54
blotting out the skies in all ten directions.
The Lord of Waters dances in ecstasy;
on the body of waters a reflected cloudscape sails by—
limbs moving in infinite grace,
patterns of gestures and movements, stances—
A wild wind out of the east whips into a frenzy,
billow-arms lifting them up high.

Costumed in rich brocade of deep-blue lotuses
figured with fabulous creatures of the deep, he dances.
Adorned with gray and white wild geese,
and wheel-shaped ducks, two-toned, yellow and rust;
with conches sounding eerie melodies
and shells, deep saffron, he dances.
Surging, waves breaking against rugged shores
in violent sport keep time with clapping of hands.

The king comes closer to the stream folding his hands in reverential greeting— a namaste.

PURŪRAVA (*addresses the stream*):

All my love has been centred on you, you alone; 55
loving and tender are my words to you, always;
my heart has never harboured the thought
of breaking faith with you, dear lady.
Yet, proud lady, you desert me, your slave;
what trifling fault do you see in me to act this way?

PURŪRAVA (*surprised*): What now? She is silent. Perhaps....this is really a river; not Urvaśī. I am quite certain that Urvaśī will never run after the ocean abandoning me, Purūrava. Never mind. Take heart. Good fortune never comes by despairing. I think I ought to go back to that same spot where the lovely charmer of my eyes vanished from sight. (*takes a turn round the stage and looking around*) Ah! What happiness indeed. For here I see a clear indication of the way she went. For :

Here is that very same tree, 56[e]
the blood-red Kadamba—
she plucked one of its blossoms,
its stamens still unripe, unkempt,

---

e. A variant recension has this additional verse following v. 56. (*The king turns around and looks*)

O, Red-Blossomed Aśoka! Where could she have gone!
My slender-waisted love — abandoning
this wretched person deeply enamoured of her!

(*noting the tree top tossing in the breeze*)

You shake your head saying, "I did not see her."
But that's all in vain— it's the breeze that shakes your head.
If you had not been struck by her lovely foot,
how could you have put on this gorgeous show of flowers †
whose petals are pressed closely together by bees?
Covered by swarming, jostling, pushing and shoving
honeybees driven by eager longing?

the tell-tale sign of summer's end—
yet, my darling placed it in her hair-knot—
an ornament.

Walking round the stage, looking.

PURŪRAVA: Here is a blackbuck; I shall implore him for news of my beloved Urvaśī.

The king approaches the blackbuck dancing a carcarī and falls on his knees.

A SINGER:

Near that great tree laden with clusters of fresh blossoms, 57
enchanting, resonant with the melodious love calls
of koels drunk with passion,
and murmurous thronged by honeybees,
Indra's white mount, Airāvata,
monarch of elephant-herds wanders forlorn
in Nandana, the groves of Paradise,
burned by the fires of separation from his beloved mate.

Dancing a galitaka on his knees, the king addresses the blackbuck.

PURŪRAVA:

The beauty of this blackbuck 58
dark blue and fawn in colour
seems itself the lovely glance
of the goddess of the woodlands
which she throws to glimpse
the splendour of the landscape.

Observes the blackbuck closely.

How discourteous he is to me! He turns his face away in another direction. (*observes again*) Oh! I see why.

PURŪRAVA:

There is his dearly-loved doe coming towards him 59
hindered by her fawn nursing at her teats.
The buck, her loving lord has eyes only for her,
his neck bent and gaze riveted on her.

The king dances in a kneeling position.

The beauty who is the ornament of the World of Light 60
is she, moving with languorous grace
bearing the burden of full, heavy hips
and high, swelling breasts nestling close to each other;

lissome, blessed with everlasting youth
she walks with the stately gait of the wild goose.
The doe-eyed lady must be roaming in these woodlands
brilliantly robed in the deep blue-green of the
rain-drenched sky.
If you have seen her give me the news that would ferry me
over this desolate sea of separation from her.

The king greets the buck reverentially with a namaste.

Ho there, noble Lord of the Herd!

Have you seen my beloved in the forest? 61
Let me tell you the marks by which you'll know her.
Listen. She has large, lovely eyes like your wife;
her glances have the same grace and charm.

Mark! What scant attention he pays to my words; he looks only in his wife's direction. But that's to be expected. Anyone fallen on hard times always encounters humiliation.[f] So.....from here....(*the king walks round the stage; he notices something*)

PURŪRAVA (*observing closely*) : What's this, this object wedged in the cleft of the rock that catches my eye? An object glinting an intense red?

A lustrous halo encircles it. 62
It is not a piece of flesh
of some deer killed by a lion.
A spark of fire perhaps? No.
The ground is moist drenched by rain.

(*observes more closely*)

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f. A verse found in another text:
PURŪRAVA: That's only to be expected—the inevitable consequence of a change for the worse in my fortunes:

What an unworthy act!
What an exalted lineage sprung from the Moon!
Will she ever be seen again?
I possess the sacred knowledge to exorcise evils.
Ah! How lovely was her face even in anger!
What would men of wisdom free from impurities say?
Even in dreams a vision of her is unattainable!
O, my heart, my mind! O, my inmost self! Be at peace.
Who knows what young man blessed by fortune
will enjoy the nectar of her lower lip!
Meantime, let me leave this place;
I shall plunge into some other place.

Strange indeed! A brilliant gem!
Its heart of fire glows intense red
like a bright spray of Aśoka blossoms.
The sun stretches an eager ray-hand out
determined to pick it up.

It captivates my mind. Yes, I'll take it.

SINGER:

The lord of tuskers wanders around 63
in the forest, disconsolate—
face thin and drawn, faded,
eyes pale, tear-drenched,
his taste for life
bound up with his beloved.

The king steps forward and stretches out his hand; then stops himself.

PURŪRAVA (*stopping*): On the other hand:

This gem justly deserves to be set in her hair 64
perfumed by exquisite Mandāra blossoms—
a jewel fit to adorn the hair-knot.
Since she, dearly-beloved is at present
not to be found, why should I take it
only to drench it with my tears?

A VOICE (*backstage*): Child, take it! Take it! For:

It is the Saṅgamaṇīya, 65
the marvellous gem of reunion,
born of the bright red lākṣa juice tinting
the holy feet of the Mountain-Born Goddess.
He who holds this gem will have restored to him
the one he loves most, without delay.

The king listens attentively.

PURŪRAVA: Whose voice is this that I hear? It speaks urgently to me.[g] (*he looks in various directions*) Some holy personage? A hermit leading the life of creatures in the forest? Perhaps. Oh! most reverend Sir, I am most grateful for your advice. (*moves forward with dvipadikā steps and picks up the gem*) Come marvellous gem; most precious Saṅgamaṇīya!

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g. A variant reading:
Who is this that takes pity on me? (*reflecting*) I think it is Lord Śiva Himself, the Lord clad in an elephant-hide—it is he who shows compassion; or some hermit who leads the life of creatures in the forests, perhaps.

If only you would be the instrument of my reunion 66
with the slender-waisted lady parted from me,
I shall honour you, noble gem and place you in my crest
even as Lord Śiva honoured the crescent moon.

(*The king walks a few paces, turns round and looks around*) How strange! This vine looking forlorn, bearing no blossoms attracts me strongly. Looking at her, passionate desire rises in my heart. But then, what is so surprising in that. For it is indeed fitting that my heart is gladdened by it; for this vine:

Slender like my lissome Urvaśī, 67
her leaves limp drenched by rain drops
like Urvaśī's tear-washed lower lip;
bearing no flowers—the season long gone—
she mourns like a woman from a loving husband
separated, forlorn, wearing no ornaments;
surrounded by silence—no murmurous sound
of honeybees circling round her—
like my beloved wrapped in the silence of anxious thoughts,
full of remorse for scorning me fallen humbly at her feet.

PURŪRAVA:

Mark me, O, vine! See me wandering 68
benumbed as if I possessed no heart.
If by fate's kindness I regain my sweetheart,
I swear I shall take her away
out of this forest of enchantments;
I shall make an end of these delusions;
never will I let her enter these forests
to make my life one long misery.

The king moves close to the vine dancing a carcarī and embraces the vine; Urvaśī at once appears in its place. With his eyes closed he remains embracing the vine; Urvaśī feels him thrilling with delight.

PURŪRAVA: What joy! Amazing! Waves of delight flow over my body soothing me as if I am holding Urvaśī in my arms. Yet, I cannot put my trust in anything anymore. For:

Whatever I take to be my beloved 69
turns out in an instant to be otherwise.
I shall not open my eyes yet, not for a while
though I feel from the touch that I am holding her.

PURŪRAVA (*slowly opening his eyes*): It is really my beloved. (*he falls down in a faint*)

URVAŚĪ (*shedding tears*): O my lord! Wake up. Wake up.

PURŪRAVA (*regaining consciousness*): My dearest, I live again, now.

Once I was lost in the darkness following 70
my separation from you, beautiful lady.
Now by Fortune's grace you have returned to me
like consciousness to a man in a deep swoon.

URVAŚĪ: Ah! Great king! Forgive me. How I reduced my loving lord to this terrible condition, all because I was in the obsessive grip of anger!

PURŪRAVA: Oh, my gracious lady. Where is the need to ask for forgiveness? The very sight of you brings peace and happiness to my inmost self. All my senses, inner and outer experience delight. But tell me, my love, how could you possibly have remained separated from me for so long?

The king dances to a carcarī song.

Wandering long in the forests in sorrow, weeping, 71
was there anyone I failed to ask about you?
Peacock and koel, swan and ruddy drake and bee,
elephant and deer, even mountain and stream?

URVAŚĪ: I saw it all, my lord; with my senses lying hidden deep within me I could perceive quite clearly whatever was happening to the great king.

PURŪRAVA: I do not understand what you mean by the phrase "my senses lying hidden deep within".

URVAŚĪ: I shall explain it all to you. Listen, my lord. Once, the glorious lord, Kumāra, Śiva's son took a vow of perpetual celibacy and came to live in a grove named Akaluṣa[h] in the outskirts of the Gandhamādana Mountains. There he pronounced a solemn interdiction.

PURŪRAVA: Of what nature?

URVAŚĪ: It said; "Any woman who enters my grove shall be instantly metamorphosed into a vine. She shall not be restored to her own form except by the touch of the gem sprung from the feet of Gaurī, my mother." At that time my mind had already become darkened by the curse of my guru, Sage Bharata. And I forgot about Kumāra's divine interdiction. Not accepting my lord's conciliatory words I rushed into the sacred grove. At the very instant I set foot within the grove I found myself changing into a spring jasmine.

h. Pure.

PURŪRAVA: Now, everything is falling into place.

My dearest, were it not for this fateful event 72
how could you have endured the long separation
when, you would feel as if I had gone away
on a long journey if at anytime
I fell into the deep sleep of exhaustion
beside you after love's long passionate play!

And further let me tell you. Learning from a holy hermit of the gem of reunion as the sole means of our reunion according to the terms of Lord Kumāra's interdiction that you mentioned, I have at last regained you by the marvellous power possessed by that gem. (*the king shows Urvaśī the gem*)

URVAŚĪ: O, here it is, The Gem of Reunion! And by its power I was restored to my natural state when Your Highness embraced me in the form of a spring jasmine. (*She takes the gem and places it on her forehead*).

PURŪRAVA: My beautiful love! Stand still just as you are for a moment.

Lit up by the fiery glow of this gem on your brow, 73
scattering its scintillating rays of light,
your face wears the glory of the lotus
deep-rose in hue illumined by dawn's first light.

URVAŚĪ: My lord, you speak words so pleasant to hear. But remember, it has been a very long time indeed since you left your imperial city of Pratiṣṭhāna. Soon your people will begin to censure me in no uncertain terms. So, come, let us return.

PURŪRAVA: As you wish.

URVAŚĪ: And how would His Majesty wish to travel?

PURŪRAVA:

Turn a newly-formed rain cloud into an aerial chariot : 74
Indra's bow will become the splendid paintings adorning it;
glittering flashes of lightning will be its streaming banners;
take me home in it, my lady who walks in stately beauty.

The king dances to a carcarī song.

SINGER:

Reunited with his dear companion, 75
his body thrilling with delight,
the young wild goose roams joyfully
his wish for an aerial chariot granted.

All exit dancing to a khaṇḍadhārā song.

ACT FIVE

MĀṆAVAKA: By the grace of good fortune, my dear friend has returned after enjoying himself with Urvaśī for a long time in the forests and groves, chief of these being the Nandana Groves that are the haunts of divinities. Now he has taken up the reins of government attended upon by his ministers and notable citizens who come honouring him with gifts. He lacks for nothing....except one thing....he has no heir. As it is a special day today, he has bathed this morning at the confluence of the holy rivers, Gangā and Yamunā with his queens; and now he has entered the palace. While His Honour is dressed and adorned I shall go and take the first share of the flowers and fragrances set out for him.

A voice behind the scenes.

Oh, misery! What shall I do? I was carrying the gem that is worthy of being worn by the queens in the Private Apartments. It was placed in a small palm-leaf basket with a fine silk kerchief spread on it. A vulture swooped down, thinking it to be a gob of flesh and flew off with the gem.

MĀṆAVAKA (*listening attentively*): Alas! What a terrible mishap! That gem, the Saṅgamaṇīya, worn on the forehead was specially prized by my dear friend. It is on account of this that His Lordship rose suddenly from his seat, leaving his toilette incomplete; he is coming this way.

The king and his attendants[43] *enter in great consternation.*

PURŪRAVA:

1
Where is that winged thief
who dares carry with him his own death?
Where is he, the first to rob the house
of him who is the Protector of the World?

KIRĀTĪ: There, there he is circling, drawing glittering lines in the sky with the gem that hangs from his beak by its golden chain.

PURŪRAVA: Oh, yes, I see him:

2
Swinging the gem hanging from his beak
by its golden chain, flying at incredible speed
in ever-rising spirals whirling the gem around
like a burning fire brand, its redness tracing
circles of flashing lustre.

Now what do we do?

MĀṆAVAKA (*approaching*): Show him no mercy; a criminal ought to be punished.

PURŪRAVA: You are quite right. My bow, bring me my bow.

The Kirātī, keeper of the king's bow, exits.

PURŪRAVA : Look, my friend, the bird is now out of sight.

MĀṆAVAKA: This carrion-eater who deserves to be punished has flown south.

PURŪRAVA (*turning round, looks carefully*): Yes, I see him now.

The bird is fashioning an ornament, 3
a crest-jewel for the southern quarter's lovely face,
of the gem sprouting lustrous filaments of light
that resemble a spray of bright red Aśoka blossoms.

The Kirātī returns with the king's bow and quiver.

KIRĀTĪ: Here is Your Majesty's bow with its wrist-guard.

PURŪRAVA (*dejected*): Oh! What use is the bow to me now? That dastardly carrion-eater has flown beyond my arrow's reach.

Carried far away by the soaring bird, 4
the rare jewel glows in the distance
like the red planet at night in close conjunction
with a dun-coloured fragment of cloud.

The king turns to the Chamberlain.

Noble Lātavya, go to the chief of police[a] with my order that he should hunt for this winged thief when he goes to roost at sundown.

LĀTAVYA: Yes, my lord, I go with your command. (*exit*)

MĀṆAVAKA: Your Honour, you had better sit down and relax. Where can this jewel-thief possibly run and hide from your justice?

The king and vidūṣaka sit down.

PURŪRAVA:

It is not because it is a priceless gem 5
that I prize it so highly, my friend.
It is the Gem of Reunion, the Saṅgamaṇīya,
that restored to me my beloved.

MĀṆAVAKA: Yes, you have already told me so.

---

a. variant reading : Let the guards at the city gates be ordered to hunt for this vile thief ; and search for him where birds gather.

Lātavya enters holding the gem and an arrow.

LĀTAVYA: Glory! Glory to our lord!

Sentenced to death this bird received his just deserts, 6
falling from the skies[b] with the crest-jewel,
his body pierced by your power
seeking crime out in the shape of this arrow.

Everyone is astounded.

LĀTAVYA: The gem has been washed with water. Whom shall I entrust it to?

PURŪRAVA: Kirātī, take the gem, purify it by fire and place it in its box in the strong room.

KIRĀTĪ: As Your Majesty commands. (*exits carrying the gem*)

PURŪRAVA: Noble Lātavya, do you know whose arrow this is?

LĀTAVYA: There is a name engraved on it; but my sight is too weak to make out the characters correctly.

PURŪRAVA: Bring the arrow[c] to me.

Lātavya hands the arrow to the king who reads the name and feels joy at having discovered that he has a son.

LĀTAVYA: I had better return to my post, my lord. (*exits*)

MĀṆAVAKA: You are in deep thought, Your Honour. What is it?

PURŪRAVA: Just listen to the name of the warrior who shot this arrow. (*reads it out*):

This arrow belongs to Prince Āyus 7
Wielder of the Bow who takes the lives of foes;
to Ilā's son, Purūrava, was he born
borne by Urvaśī.

MĀṆAVAKA (*with great joy*): Ah! My dear friend, heartfelt felicitations. You are blessed with a son.

PURŪRAVA (*puzzled*): How could this be, Māṇavaka. Except during the period of sacrifices performed in the Naimiṣa Forests I was never separated from Urvaśī. Nor did I see any visible signs of pregnancy. Where was this son born?

For only a few days a change came over her body: 8
her eyes had an air of weariness,

---

b. variant reading...upakāryāntarāt, falling near another pavilion.
c. variant...so that I can read the name of this skilled archer.

her face the paleness of lavāli leaves;
and the tips of her breasts grew rough and dark.

MĀṆAVAKA: Your honour should not ascribe the same norms that apply to mortal women to celestial women as well. They have supernatural powers to conceal what goes on in their lives.

PURŪRAVA: Be that as it may, but, what reason did Her Ladyship have to conceal the birth of a son?

MĀṆAVAKA: Who can guess the secrets of celestials?

The Chamberlain, Lātavya enters.

LĀTAVYA: Glory! Glory to our lord! My lord; an ascetic lady has arrived from the sage Cyavana's hermitage with a young boy. She wishes to see you.

PURŪRAVA: Usher them into my presence immediately.

LĀTAVYA: As my lord commands.

Lātavya goes out and returns with the ascetic lady and the boy holding his bow.

LĀTAVYA: This way, come this way, revered lady. (*all three turn around*)

MĀṆAVAKA: Could this be the warrior prince whose name was engraved on the crescent-shaped arrow that hit its mark, the vulture, and killed it? He really resembles Your Honour.

PURŪRAVA: He may be that one; perhaps that's why,

My eyes alighting on him well with tears: 9
my heart overflows with a father's tender affection,
and my inner being feels serene joy;
I lose my kingly poise and firmness
as trembling seizes my limbs; and I yearn
to press the boy closely in a loving embrace.

LĀTAVYA: Revered lady, be pleased to wait here.

The ascetic lady and the boy stop and wait.

PURŪRAVA: Mother, I bow to you.

SATYAVATĪ: Great king on whom fortune smiles, may you perpetuate the lunar lineage! (*to herself*) Without being told the Royal Sage knows the prince to be his son. (*aloud*) My child, bow down before your father.

The prince bows low doing a namaste holding the bow between his hands.

PURŪRAVA: May you be blessed with long life!

PRINCE (*to himself*):

He is my father; I am his son; 10
hearing this such deep affection for him
springs at once in my heart. Imagine then
the intense affection of sons
who grew up in their father's laps
loved and cherished from the moment of their birth!

PURŪRAVA: Revered mother, what brings you here to our court?

SATYAVATĪ: Great king, listen. This prince, Āyus of long life, was for good reasons of her own placed in my care by Urvaśī the moment he was born. Beginning with the birth-ceremony all the prescribed rites for a Kṣhatriya boy have been duly performed for him by the illustrious sage, Cyavana. After receiving instruction in the Vedas and in the sciences, Āyus has been given complete knowledge and training in the martial arts and sciences.

PURŪRAVA: In that case the boy has been well brought up with all the support a guardian can give a child.

SATYAVATĪ: Today when he set out with the other boys to gather flowers and firewood for the altar he committed an act forbidden in the hermitage.

MĀṆAVAKA (*with some anxiety*) : What did he do?

SATYAVATĪ: It was reported that he took aim at a vulture on a tree top holding a piece of flesh.

The vidūṣaka looks meaningfully at the king.

PURŪRAVA: What happened then?

SATYAVATĪ: When the holy sage Cyavana received this report, he instructed me to return my charge. Therefore, I wish to see the queen, Urvaśī.

PURŪRAVA: Take a seat, revered lady.

The ascetic accepts the seat offered to her.

PURŪRAVA: Lātavya, please summon Urvaśī.

LĀTAVYA: As Your Majesty commands (*exits*)

PURŪRAVA (*looking at the prince*): Come, come to me, my child.

It is so true that the touch of a child 11
thrills every inch of one's body;
so, come to me and gladden me now
as the moonbeam's .ouch melts the moonstone.

SATYAVATĪ: Dear child, make your father happy.

The prince approaches the king. Kneels and clasps his father's feet.

PURŪRAVA (*embraces his son and seats him on the footstool*) : My child, here sits your father's dearest friend and companion; greet this Brāhmaṇa without the least hesitation.

MĀṆAVAKA: Why should he hesitate? We all know that he lived in a hermitage and must therefore be familiar with a monkey.

PRINCE (*smiling*): I bow to you, dear father. (*bows to the vidūṣaka*)

MĀṆAVAKA: Bless you, Your Honour.

Urvaśī enters with Lātavya.

LĀTAVYA: This way, this way my lady.

URVAŚĪ (*looking at Prince Āyus*): Who might this youth be sitting on the king's footstool bow in hand, so close to His Majesty? And the great king himself is tenderly tying the boy's long hair into a topknot! (*notices the ascetic lady*). Ah! Satyavatī has come. So this must be my darling little boy, Āyus. Ah! How he has grown! (*she goes round the stage*)

PURŪRAVA (*seeing Urvaśī*):

Here comes your mother who gave you birth, 12
gazing on you unable to take her eyes off your face.
Her bodice is wet with the milk of her breasts
flowing spontaneously out of a mother's love.

SATYAVATĪ: Dear child, go up to your mother.

The prince gets up and goes to meet Urvaśī.

URVAŚĪ (*to Satyavatī*): Honoured mother, I clasp your feet and ask for your blessing.

SATYAVATĪ: Dear daughter, may your husband always honour you.

PRINCE (*bowing to his mother*): Mother, with reverence, I announce myself. I am Āyus.

URVAŚĪ (*raising the prince's face, embraces him*) : My darling boy, always honour your father. (*approaching the king*) Glory! Glory to the great king.

PURŪRAVA: Welcome to the mother of my son. Come, be seated here, by my side. (*offers Urvaśī half his own seat; she sits beside him*)

The retinue also sits down in order of their status.

SATYAVATĪ: Āyus has now completed his education and is entering manhood ready to wear armour and be a warrior. Therefore in the presence of your royal husband I now relinquish my charge and

return to you what you entrusted to me. I now wish to be given leave to depart. The time I spend here comes in the way of my duties at the hermitage, disturbing their course.

URVAŚĪ: Seeing you after a very long time I thirst even more for your company. I am reluctant to let you go. But I know that I have no right to detain you. So, honoured lady, by all means take your leave. Let us hope to meet again.

PURŪRAVA: Mother, pay my respects to the revered sage, Cyavana.

SATYAVATĪ: I shall do so.

PRINCE ĀYUS: Noble lady, if you are really returning to the hermitage take me with you.

PURŪRAVA: Dear boy, you have lived the first phase of your life in the hermitage. It is now time for you to commence the second phase.

SATYAVATĪ: Yes, my dear child; you have to listen to your father's words.

PRINCE ĀYUS: In that case, be sure to do this for me:

> Send me my peacock, the fledgling Maṇikaṇṭhaka[d], 13
> as soon as his plumage is fully grown;
> he always slept peacefully on my lap you remember,
> enjoying it as I stroked his crest.

SATYAVATĪ (*smiling*): I certainly shall. May you all be well and happy. (*exits*)

PURŪRAVA: Lady most gracious:

> Blessed with this son you have borne to me, 14
> today I stand the best and foremost of fathers like Indra,
> Destroyer of Enemy Forts[e], when his queen, Paulomī,
> bore him Jayanta, best of sons.

Urvaśī reminded of something weeps bitterly.

MĀṆAVAKA: Why all on a sudden are Her Ladyship's eyes swimming with tears?

PURŪRAVA (*anxiously*):

> When great joy is mine seeing my line stable, assured, 15
> why do you weep bitterly, my beautiful love, letting fall
> lines of teardrops over high swelling breasts, that merely repeat
> the beauty of the strings of pearldrops adorning them?

Urvaśī wipes away her tears.

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d. Jewel-throat.
e. Puramdara.

URVAŚĪ: Listen great king. I have something to tell you. At first the joy of seeing the face of my child once again made me forget it. But when great Indra's name was mentioned its memory came rushing back—the recollection of the decree that had been rankling in my heart[f].

PURŪRAVA: What decree?

URVAŚĪ: When at first I gave my heart to you, great king, I was commanded by great Indra."[f]

PURŪRAVA: What was Indra's command ?

URVAŚĪ:".......[g] when my dear friend, the royal sage Purūrava sees the face of his son and heir you will bear him assuring him of the continuity of his dynasty, then it is time for your return to my side." Overwhelmed by the fear of separation from you, great king, the moment the child was born, I took him to the holy sage Cyavana's hermitage for the purposes of his education and in secret entrusted him to the care of the noble lady, Satyavatī. Today, realizing that he was grown up sufficiently to be a help and comfort to his father she came here with my son of long life to hand him over to me. And now, my lord, this marks the end of my stay with you.

Everyone present is grief-stricken. [h]

PURŪRAVA (*sighing deeply*): Oh! How adverse Fate can be to human happiness!

> No sooner had the coming of a son 16
> allayed the sorrow gnawing at my heart,
> than parting from you faces me, lissome love,
> like the lightning's fire that blights the tree
> reviving under the showers of the first rain clouds
> after enduring the pain of blistering summer heat.

MĀṆAVAKA: That bit of good fortune has come trailing a series of misfortunes. Now I guess that Your Honour has to put on bark garments and proceed to the penance groves.

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f. Some readings have the following: "In the first flush of happiness on seeing my child's face again I forgot something; I forgot the condition laid upon me by great Indra; it had been rankling in my heart."

g. "Listen to me, great king. When at first I gave my heart to you, great king, I was cursed by my guru. Great Indra then set a term for the curse, decreeing thus: 'When my dear friend ....return to my side.' "

h. variant reading: (*the king swoons*)
All present: Revive the great king.
Kancukī: Courage, great king.

URVAŚĪ: Now that I have to return to Svarga, Your Majesty might be led to think the worse of me—my fortunes being at their lowest ebb—that now, having my child restored to me after completing his education my purpose has been achieved; and with nothing more left for me here, I am returning to Svarga.

PURŪRAVA: My lovely queen, do not say such things.

Dependent on the will of another who for the asking 17
can effectually make our separation happen,
you are powerless to do what is most dear to you.
Obey the command of your lord to whom you owe allegiance.
And I, entrusting my empire to your son Āyus
shall retire to the forests where herds of deer roam.

ĀYUS: Is my dear father well-advised to lay the yoke drawn by the best of bulls on the inexperienced shoulders of a yearling?

PURŪRAVA: O, no, my dear son; do not think so.

The prime tusker wafting his strong scent 18
overcomes the common herd though he is young.
The venom of an infant cobra
takes effect instantly coursing swiftly.
A king born to sovereignty is endowed with qualities
to rule the earth even in tender youth.
Birth fits him to carry out his duties;
it is not his years that make him equal to his task.

Noble Lātavya, convey this command to my council of ministers Let them make preparations forthwith for the coronation of Prince Āyus.

LĀTAVYA: As the great lord commands. (*exits sadly*)

All present look shocked

PURŪRAVA (*looking up at the sky*) : What's this? Strange indeed! A flash of lightning in a cloudless sky!

URVAŚĪ (*Also looking up*): Ah! It is the holy sage Nārada!

PURŪRAVA: Yes indeed. Its the revered Nārada himself. There he is :

His matted topknot tawny as the stone 19
streaked with gorocana ground on it;
the sacred thread he wears, the purest white
like the unblemished sliver of the crescent moon;
he appears to be a moving Wish-Granting Tree of Paradise
with golden boughs and wreaths of pearls enhancing its glory.

The king turns to his attendants.

PURŪRAVA: The ritual offerings! Quick, bring the ritual offerings to honour the holy sage.

URVAŚĪ (*taking the salver from an attendant*): Here, my lord; the ritual offerings for the worship of the glorious seer.

Nārada enters.

NĀRADA: Glory to the Protector of the Middle World!

PURŪRAVA (*taking the salver from Urvaśī's hands*) : Glorious Seer! I bow to you in reverence. (*offers the Arghya*)

URVAŚĪ (*bows low*): Glorious Seer! I tender homage to you.

NĀRADA: My blessings on you both; may you live as an inseparable couple!

PURŪRAVA (*to himself*): If only that would come true! (*aloud, embracing his son*) My dear child, pay your respects to the illustrious sage.

ĀYUS: Glorious Seer, I, Āyus, son of Urvaśī render homage to Your Reverence[j].

NĀRADA: May you be blessed with long life!

The king offers Nārada a seat.

PURŪRAVA: Your Reverence! Honour me by being seated.[k]

Nārada accepts the seat, all follow him and sit down.

NĀRADA : Your Majesty, now listen to the message from great Indra.

PURŪRAVA: I am all attention.

NĀRADA: The munificent lord, Indra, who has the power to see all, cognizant of your resolve to retire to the forest directs you—

PURŪRAVA: What is his command?

NĀRADA: These are Indra's words: "Seers who have the power to see the three modes of time, past, present and future, have foretold that there would be a war between the Devas and the Dānavas. Your Honour is our staunch ally, a warrior skilled in warfare. You should not lay down your arms. As long as you shall live, Urvaśī will be your lawful wedded wife and partner in all sacred rites."

URVAŚĪ (*aside*): The thorn lodged in my heart has now been removed.

PURŪRAVA: I owe allegiance to the supreme Lord of the Devas.

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j. variant reading: I, Āyus son of Purūrava and Urvaśī...Render homage to you. Reverence.

k. A variant reading adds this : Your Reverence, kindly impart to me the purpose of your coming.

NĀRADA: Very proper indeed.

> Indra, Lord of the Vasus should look after your interests; 20
> and you should carry out his wishes.
> The Sun strengthens fire and Fire energizes
> the Sun with his own brilliance.

NĀRADA (*looking up at the skies*): Rambhā, bring down the materials that great Indra himself gathered together for the Rite of Consecration of Prince Āyus as the Heir Apparent.

Enter Rambhā with other Apsarās carrying the materials for the sacred rites.

APSARĀS: Glorious Seer! Here are the materials required for the Rite of Consecration.

NĀRADA: Let the prince of long life be seated on the consecrated golden stool.

RAMBHĀ: Come here, my child (*seats the prince*)

NĀRADA (*takes the golden pitcher of consecrated water and pours it over the prince's head*): Rambhā, here, perform the other rites.

RAMBHĀ (*carries out the remaining rites*): Dear child, now render homage with utmost reverence to the Glorious Seer and then to your parents.

The prince makes full-length prostrations at the feet of Nārada and his parents as directed.

NĀRADA: May you be blessed with good fortune ! (*blesses the prince*)

PURŪRAVA (*blesses his son*): May you be the family's greatest leader!

URVAŚĪ (*blessing her son*): May you always stand firm in your father's good graces!

Bards heard backstage.

FIRST BARD: Let Victory attend the Crown Prince:

> Like the immortal sage Atri his father Brahmā, 21
> like the Moon his father Atri,
> like the wise Budha his father, the cool-rayed moon,
> like our lord his wise father Budha,
> may you also follow your father
> emulating all his virtues extolled by the world.
> In your most exalted lineage
> all blessings have found perfect fulfillment!

SECOND BARD:

Foremost among the noblest stands your father; 22
you are unshakable in courage, unswerving in virtuous conduct.
Now Royal Glory stands in unsurpassed splendour.
Dividing herself equally between the two,
like holy Gaṅgā dividing her waters
between lofty Himalaya and the great Ocean.

APSARĀS (*approaching Urvaśī*): Felicitations on your son being vested with the honours of the heir apparent; and on your own good fortune in being permitted to stay with you husband.

URVAŚĪ: The happiness belongs to all.[44] (*taking the prince by the hand*) Come, my darling boy; let's go and greet your elder mother so that you can pay your respects to Her Ladyship.

The Prince prepares to leave.

PURŪRAVA: Stay, we shall all present ourselves together before Her Ladyship at the proper time.[m]

NĀRADA

The royal splendour of installation 23
of Āyus, your son as Crown Prince
calls to my mind the consecration
of the warrior-god, Kumāra, son of Śiva,
as Supreme commander of the Great Army,[n]
performed by Indra himself, Lord of Storms.

PURŪRAVA: Thus highly favoured by Your Reverence how can Āyus not prove worthy?

NĀRADA: Is there any other favour that Indra can bestow on you?

PURŪRAVA: If Indra, The Munificent Lord is pleased with me what more can I wish for? Yet, there is one last boon that I shall ask for;

Rarely does one see a happy union 24
of Wealth and Learning
often at variance with each other.
Therefore for the good of all
let Śrī and Sarasvatī[p]
always dwell together.

All exit.

End of Act Five and the play
Vikramorvaśīyam

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m. This is Velankar's reading (*S.A.ed*) which I follow as more appropriate; other editions give this line to Nārada as follows:
Nārada: Stay, you shall present yourself before Her Ladyship at the right moment.

n. Mahāsenā, Armies of the Devas

p. The goddesses of Wealth and Glory, and of Learning and the Arts.

ABHIJÑĀNAŚĀKUNTALAM

(The Recognition of Śakuntalā)

A Play in Seven Acts

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PROLOGUE

Chanters of the Benediction

SŪTRADHĀRA	:	Director-Producer; probably plays the hero or nāyaka's role.
NAṬĪ	:	Leading actress, probably the wife of the Sūtradhāra; perhaps plays the nāyikā or heroine.

PLAY

DUḤṢANTA	:	Monarch of the lunar dynasty ruling at Hastināpura; the nāyaka or hero.
SŪTA	:	The Royal Charioteer.
ŚAKUNTALĀ	:	The nāyikā or heroine; adopted daughter of Sage Kaṇva.
ANASŪYĀ PRIYAMVADĀ	:	Friends and close companions of Śakuntalā.
MĀḌHAVYA	:	Vidūṣaka, the Court Jester; the king's close friend and childhood companion.
RAIVATA	:	The guard and doorkeeper.
BHADRASENA	:	Senāpati or Supreme Commander of the Army.
GAUTAMĪ	:	Matron of Kaṇva's hermitage.
HĀRĪTA	:	Son of a sage living in the Hermitage, and his companion.
KANVA	:	A celebrated sage, head or kulapati of the hermitage; also referred to as Kaśyapa in some recensions of the play.
ŚĀRṄGARAVA ŚĀRADVATA	:	Disciples of Kaṇva.
PĀRVATĀYANA	:	Chamberlain, in charge of the Royal Household.
VETRAVATĪ	:	Doorkeeper and guard of the Inner Apartments (antaḥpura).

SOMARĀṬA	:	High Priest; the king's preceptor.
SŪCAKA JĀNUKA	:	Two policemen on the beat.
A FIṢHERMAN		
THE CHIEF OF POLICE		
MIŚRAKEŚĪ	:	An Apsarā, friend of Menakā, mother of Śakuntalā.
PARABHṚTIKĀ MADHUKARIKĀ	:	(Little Cuckoo) Keepers in charge of the royal (Little Honeybee) pleasure gardens and groves.
CATURIKĀ	:	The king's personal attendant.
MĀTALI	:	Indra's charioteer and messenger.
SARVADAMANA	:	The young son of Duḥṣanta and Śakuntalā; later the emperor Bharata, after whom the land now known as India was and is known, as Bhārata-varṣa.
SUVRATĀ & COMPANION	:	Two hermit ladies in Kaṇva's hermitage; in charge of the prince, Sarvadamana, Śakuntalā's son.
MĀRĪCA	:	The Primal Parent (Prajāpati)
ADITI	:	The consort of Mārīca and mother of Indra.
KARABHAKA	:	The Queen-Mother's emissary.
AN ANCHORITE AND HIS DISCIPLE		
TWO ROYAL BARDS OR VAITĀLIKAS		
TWO YOUNG HERMITS		
A PUPIL OF KAṆVA		
GĀLAVA	:	A Pupil of Mārīca

CHARACTERS OFF-STAGE

DURVĀSA	:	A powerful sage known for his irascibility and readiness to curse.
AERIAL VOICES	:	The divine voice that speaks to Kaṇva in the Fire Sanctuary; the cuckoo's voice in Act Four; voices of sylvan divinities in Kaṇva's hermitage who bless Śakuntalā in Act Four.

PERSONS ONLY MENTIONED

KAUŚIKA	:	The Royal Sage Viśvāmitra, the real father of Śakuntalā.

MENAKĀ	:	An Apsarā, dancer at Indra's Court, and Śakuntalā's real mother.
INDRA	:	Lord of the Devas; ruler of Svarga.
JAYANTA	:	Indra's son.
VASUMATĪ	:	The Queen-Consort.
MITRĀVASU	:	The Queen-Consort's brother.
PIŚUNA	:	The Chief Minister.
DHANAVṚDDHI	:	Also referred to in some recensions as Dhanamitra, a wealthy merchant prince in Duḥṣanta's kingdom; probably the Chief of the city's merchant guild; lost at sea in the play.

SCENE

ACTS ONE TO FOUR are located in the forests at the foothills of the Himalayas and in Kaṇva's hermitage.

ACTS FIVE AND SIX are placed in the royal palace in Hastināpura and in the city's market place.

ACT SEVEN is placed in the golden world presided over by the Primal Parents, Mārīca and Aditi.

TIME

ACTS ONE TO SIX : Summer through to autumn

ACT SEVEN: In the mythic world beyond Time.

PROLOGUE

Benediction

That First Creation of the Creator: 1
That Bearer of oblations offered with Holy Rites:
That one who utters the Holy Chants:
Those two that order Time:
That which extends, World-Pervading,
in which sound flows impinging on the ear:
That which is proclaimed the Universal Womb of Seeds:
That which fills all forms that breathe
with the Breath of Life.
May the Supreme lord of the Universe
who stands revealed in these eight Forms[a] perceptible
preserve you.

After the benediction enter the Sūtradhāra.

SŪTRADHĀRA (*looking towards the green-room*): Lady! If the preparations in the dressing room are completed, would you be pleased to attend us?

NAṬĪ (*entering*): Here I am, my lord; what are your orders regarding this evening's performance?

SŪTRADHĀRA (*looks around*): Lady, we have here before us, an august audience that is highly educated and most discerning. This evening we wait upon it with a new play composed by Kālidāsa, entitled *ABHIJÑĀNAŚĀKUNTALAM*. Will you see to it that all the actors do their very best?

NAṬĪ: With your excellent training and direction, my lord, nothing will be found wanting.

SŪTRADHĀRA (*smiling*): The truth of the matter, my lady, is:

a. The eight forms are in order : Water, Fire, Priest, Sun and Moon, Space, Earth. Air

Unless those who know applaud my art, 2
I cannot think I know it well;
even those most expertly schooled
cannot be wholly self-assured.

NAṬĪ: Is that so, my lord? Well, now tell me what is to follow, my lord.

SŪTRADHĀRA: Let us treat the audience to something that will delight their ears.

NAṬĪ: Which of the seasons shall I sing about?

SŪTRADHĀRA: About this very season, I should think—Summer, that set in not so long ago and is enjoyable in so many ways. For at the moment:

Days draw to a close in quiet beauty;
plunging in cool waters is delightful;
sleep drops softly in thick-shaded haunts;
woodland breezes blow fresh and fragrant
having consorted with Pātalī flowers.

NAṬĪ: Very well. (*sings*)

Exquisite are Śirīṣa blossoms— 4
see how they sway—
crested with delicate filaments—
kissed, lightly, lightly
by murmurous bees

lovely women—
exulting in their youth—
place the blossoms
tenderly—
as ornaments over their ears—

SŪTRADHĀRA: Beautifully sung, dear lady; aha—just look around you; the audience is still, as if drawn in a picture—spellbound, caught in the web of beauty woven by your singing—Now then, what play shall we put on to honour and entertain them further?

NAṬĪ: Why, Sir, what you mentioned right at the beginning—the new play entitled *ABHIJÑĀNAŚĀKUNTALAM*.

SŪTRADHĀRA: You do well to remind me, dear lady. Indeed, my memory failed me for an instant; because:

I was carried far, far away, lured
by your impassioned song, compelling,
(*looks towards the wings*)
even as the King, Duḥṣanta here, was,
by the fleet fleeing antelope.

(*exit*)

End of Prologue

ACT ONE

SCENE: The forests in the foothills of the Himalayas; later the Hermitage of Kaṇva, by the river Mālinī.

Enter on a chariot, bow and arrow in hand, in hot pursuit of a deer, the king with his charioteer.

SŪTA[1] (*looking at the king and the deer*): O Long-Lived Majesty!

Casting my eye on the fleeting blackbuck[2] 6
and on you holding the taut-strung bow,
I seem to see before my very eyes
Pinākī,[b] the Lord, chasing the deer[3].

DUḤṢANTA: We have come a long, long way, Sūta, drawn by this blackbuck; even now he is seen:

Arching his neck with infinite grace, now and then 7
he glances back at the speeding chariot,
his form curving fearful of the arrow's fall,
the haunches almost touch his chest.
Panting from fatigue, his jaws gaping wide
spill the half-chewed tender grass to mark his path.
With long leaps bounding high upwards, see how he soars
flying in the sky, scarce skimming the surface of the earth.

(*puzzled*) How is it that I can hardly see him, even though we are in such hot pursuit?

SŪTA: Sire, seeing the ground was uneven, I lightly reined in the horses; the chariot's speed slackened. Therefore, the deer was able to put so much distance between himself and us. Now that we are on level ground, you will soon see that he is not beyond your aim.

DUḤṢANTA: Slacken the reins.

SŪTA: As His Majesty commands. (*mimes increased speed of the chariot*) See, see, Sire:

The reins hanging slack, 8
the horses leap forward,

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b. Śiva

no, they glide over the track—
bodies out-stretched, ears flung back,
the tips of their plumes motionless;
the very dust whirled up
swiftly advancing cannot outstrip them.

DUḤṢANTA (*exulting*): See how they excel even Hari's[c] bright horses; therefore:

What was minute suddenly looms large; 9
what's cleft down the middle seems to unite;
the eye sees as straight what's naturally curved:
the chariot rushing along, nothing stays
near or far, even for a moment.

A VOICE OFF-STAGE: Ho there! Stop, hold, O King! This deer belonging to the Hermitage ought not to be struck down.... aha!....Do not kill him, O King.

SŪTA (*listens and looks around*) : Your Majesty, here are ascetics standing shielding the blackbuck who is now right in your arrow's path.

DUḤṢANTA (*urgently*): Quick, rein in the horses.

SŪTA: Yes, Sire. (*stops the chariot*)

Enter an ascetic accompanied by his disciple.

ASCETIC (*holding up his hand*) : This deer is of the Hermitage, O King! He should not be killed.... no, no, do not strike him down.

How fragile the life of this deer! 10
How cruel your sharp-pointed arrows, swift-winged!
never should they fall on his tender frame
like tongues of flame on a heap of flowers.

Quickly withdraw you well-aimed arrow, bound 11
to protect the distressed, not strike the pure.

DUḤṢANTA (*bowing low in respect*): It is withdrawn. (*replaces the arrow in the quiver*)

ASCETIC (*pleased*): This is indeed an act worthy of your Honour born in Puru's dynasty,[4] and the glorious light of kings. May you be blessed with a son who will turn the wheel of empire[5].

DUḤṢANTA (*bowing*): I accept a Brāhmaṇa's blessings.

ASCETIC: O King! We are on our way to gather wood for the Sacrificial

c. Indra's

Fire. There, clinging to the Himalayas, along the banks of the Mālinī is the Hermitage of our Guru, the Patriarch Kaṇva where Śakuntalā dwells like its guardian deity[6]. If other duties do not claim your time, enter and accept the hospitality proffered a guest. Further;

When you behold the sages rich in holiness . 12
immersed in the tranquil performance of holy rites
free of impediments, you will know how well
your arm scarred by the oft-drawn bowstring protects.

DUHṢANTA: Is the Patriarch at home now?

ASCETIC : Enjoining his daughter Śakuntalā to receive guests with due hospitality, he has gone not long back to Soma-tīrtha, to propitiate the adverse fate threatening her happiness.

DUHṢANTA: I shall pay my respects to her then. She will no doubt inform the great sage of my profound veneration for him.

ASCETIC: We shall then be our way. (*exits with his disciple*)

DUHṢANTA: Śūta, urge the horses on and let us purify ourselves with a sight of the holy Hermitage.

SŪTA: As Your Gracious Majesty orders.

Mimes increased speed of the chariot.

DUHṢANTA (*looking around*): Sūta, even without being told, it is plain that we are now at the outskirts of the penance-groves.

SŪTA: How can you tell, my lord?

DUHṢANTA: Do you see, sir ? Right here:

Grains of wild rice fallen from tree-hollows 13
where parrots nest, lie scattered under the trees;
those stones there look moist, glossy, from the oil
of iṅgudi-nuts split and pounded on them;
all around deer browse in their tranquil haunts,
unafraid of the chariot's approach; yonder,
drops of water dripping off the edges of bark-garments
in long lines, trace the paths to pools and streams.

And you sce further:

Rippling beneath a passing breeze, waters flow 14
in deep channels to lave the roots of trees;
smoke drifts up from oblations to the Sacred Fire
to dim the soft sheen of tender leafbuds;
free from fear, fawns browse lazily in meadows
beyond, where darbhā-shoots are closely cropped.

SŪTA: Yes, everything is as you say.

They go some distance.

DUHṢANTA: Sūta, let us not disturb the peace of the Hermitage; stop the chariot right here and I shall get down.

SŪTA: I am holding the reins fast; let His Majesty alight.

DUHṢANTA (*alights from the chariot and looks at himself*) : Hermit-groves should be visited modestly attired. So, here are my jewels and my bow. (*hands them over to the charioteer*) By the time I return from visiting the residents of the Hermitage, see that the horses are watered.

SŪTA: As His Majesty commands. (*exits*)

DUHṢANTA (*turns around and looks*) : Ah, here is the entrance to the Hermitage; I shall go in. (*enters and immediately indicates the presence of a good omen*) Ah...

Tranquil is this hermitage, yet my arm throbs[7]; 15
what fulfillment can await me here?
Yet who knows; coming events find doors
opening everywhere.

A VOICE IN THE BACKGROUND: This way, this way, dear friends.

DUHṢANTA (*listening closely*) : Aha.... I hear snatches of conversation to the south of this orchard. (*turns and look around*) I see; here are some hermit- girls coming this way... and carrying jars proportionate to their slender frames.... to water the saplings planted here. O what a charming sight!

If girls bred in a hermitage 16
can boast of such beauty rare in palaces,
is there any denying woodland vines
far surpass those nurtured in gardens?

I think I shall wait here in the shade and watch them. (*stands observing them*)

Enter Śakuntalā with her friends, occupied as described .

FIRST: Listen, dear Śakuntalā; it looks to me as if these trees in the Hermitage are dearer to Father Kaṇva than even you are; see, he has appointed you who are as delicate as a newly-opened jasmine-flower, to fill these trenches round the roots with water.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Dear Aṇasūyā, it is not merely a matter of Father's injunction; I love them like a sister. (*she mimes watering the trees*)

SECOND: Friend Śakuntalā, the trees of the Hermitage that bloom in summer have all been watered. Shall we now sprinkle those that are past flowering? That would be an act of devotion, not looking for a reward.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Priyamvadā, my friend, what a lovely thought. (*again mimes watering the trees*)

DUḤṢANTA (*to himself*): What! Is this Kaṇva's daughter, Śakuntalā? (*surprised*) Ah! How utterly lacking in judgment is the venerable Kaṇva to imprison such beauty in a dress made of bark.

> The sage who would inure to harsh penance 17
> this form ravishing in its artless beauty
> is surely attempting to cut acacia wood
> with the edge of a blue-lotus petal.

Let it be. Hidden behind these trees, I shall watch her undisturbed. (*stands concealed*)

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Sweet Anasūyā, Priyamvadā has tied my bark garment so tight that I feel quite uncomfortable; Could you loosen it a little? (*Anasūyā loosens it*)

PRIYAMVADĀ (*laughing merrily*) : Blame your own budding youth that's making your bosom swell.

DUḤṢANTA: She is right in what she says;

> With rounded breasts concealed by cloth of bark 18
> fastened at the shoulder in a fine knot,
> her youthful form enfolded like a flower
> in its pale leafy sheath unfolds not its glory.

While it is true that bark is not the appropriate dress for her youth, can it be really held that it does not become her like an adornment? Consider;

> Though inlaid in duckweed the lotus glows: 19
> a dusky spot enhances the moon's radiance;
> this lissome girl is lovelier far dressed in bark!
> What indeed is not an adornment to entrancing forms!

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*looking in front of her*): See, my friends, the mango tree over there fluttering his fingers of tender leaf sprays – as if beckoning to me. I shall go over to him. (*walks over to the tree*)

PRIYAMVADĀ: Dearest Śakuntalā, stand there for a moment.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: What for?

PRIYAMVADĀ: With you beside him, the mango looks as if wedded to a lovely vine.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: You are aptly named – 'Sweet-Talker' – aren't you?

DUHṢANTA: Priyamvadā speaks sweetly and speaks true; see how—

Her lower lip has the rich sheen of young shoots;
her arms the very grace of tender twining stems;
her limbs enchanting as a lovely flower
glow with the radiance of magical youth.

ANASŪYĀ: Look, Śakuntalā, the jasmine that you named Vanajyotsnā[d] has chosen the mango as her bridegroom.

Śakuntalā comes close to the vine and looks at it with joy.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: O Anasūyā, what a charming sight, this marriage of vine and tree. See, that jasmine has this very moment entered into her budding youth. And the mango tree is laden with young fruit indicating he is ready for enjoyment.

She stands gazing at them.

PRIYAMVADĀ (*smiling archly*): Anasūyā, guess why Śakuntalā is gazing upon Vanajyotsnā for so long with such longing.

ANASŪYĀ: No, I cannot; you tell me.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Well...this is what she is thinking : just as Vanajyotsnā has married the tree that is a worthy partner for her, so, may I also find a consort worthy of me.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: That must be your heart's desire, for sure. (*She pours water from the jar*)

ANASŪYĀ: Hey, Śakuntalā, just look; here is the Mādhavī bush that Father Kaṇva nurtured with his own hands as he nurtured you. You have forgotten her?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Then I might as well forget myself. (*comes close to the bush and exclaims in delight*) :Look, what a surprise! Priyamvadā, listen, I have something to tell that will *please* you.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Please me? What's that, my dear?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Look, Anasūyā .... The Mādhavī is covered with buds.... from the root up: this is not its season for blooming.

BOTH FRIENDS (*come hurrying up*): Really, is it true, Śakuntalā, dear?

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d. Woodland-Moonglow

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Of course it is true – can't you see?

PRIYAMVADĀ (*viewing the blossoming bush with delight*): Well, well, now it is my turn to tell you something that will please you. You will soon be married.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*with a show of annoyance*): That is certainly *your* own secret wish.

PRIYAMVADĀ: No, I am not joking; I heard it from Father Kaṇva's own lips that this would signal your wedding.

ANASŪYA : Ah! Now, we know, don't we, Priyamvadā, why Śakuntalā has been watering Mādhavī so lovingly.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: And why not... I love her like a sister. (*waters the Mādhavī*)

DUḤṢANTA: I wonder.... Could she be the Patriarch's daughter by a wife not of his own class? But, let's be done with doubts.

> It is my firm belief that by the Law[8] 21
> she can rightly be a warrior's bride,
> for my noble heart yearns deeply for her.
> When in doubt, the truest inner prompting is
> to the virtuous, unassailable authority.

Still, I think I should try and find out the true facts about her.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*in alarm*): O help, a bee has flown out of the jasmine bush... And it is buzzing round my face. (*Mimes attempts to ward off the bee*)

DUḤṢANTA (*looking longingly at her*):

> Her lovely eyes rove following 22
> the hovering bee close to her face;
> she knits her brows practising already
> playful glances though not in love—but fear.

(*with a show of vexation*)

> O, you honey-foraging thief! Blessed are you 23
> touching ever so often her restless darting eyes, tremulous,
> humming softly, hovering close to her ear
> as if eager to whisper a secret,
> sneaking in to taste her ripe lower lip
> —the quintessence of love's delight—
> even as she piteously flails her hand.
> Blessed indeed are you, while I wait
> seeking to know the truth—undone.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Friends, friends, help me, protect me from this villain who keeps harassing me.

BOTH (*laughing*): Who are we to protect you; cry out to Duḥṣanta: the holy groves are under the special protection of the king.

DUḤṢANTA: This is a golden opportunity for me to show myself. O, don't be afraid...(*checks himself halfway and speaks to himself*). No, this way, it will be evident that I am the king. Let me think... I shall assume the manner of just a plain visitor[9].

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*rather scared*): This impudent fellow will not leave me alone. I shall go from this place. (*takes a few steps, stops and throws a quick glance behind*) O help! He follows me.

DUḤṢANTA (*hastily steps forward*): Ha!

While the chastiser of the wicked, 24
great Puru's scion rules over this rich earth,
who dares behave in this churlish manner
to guileless, young girls of the hermitage.

Seeing the king, all three are taken aback.

ANASŪYA: O noble Sir, it is nothing very serious; our dear friend here (*pointing to Śakuntalā*) was being bothered by a large bee and got frightened.

DUḤṢANTA (*approaching Śakuntalā*): I trust your devotions go well. (*Śakuntalā, confused, is silent*)

ANASŪYĀ (*addressing the king*): All goes well now, Sir, since we have the honour of waiting on a distinguished guest.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Welcome to you, noble Sir.

ANASŪYĀ: Dear Śakuntalā, go and bring the proper guest-offering and some fruit. The water we have here will serve to wash the guest's feet.

DUḤṢANTA: I have already been welcomed by your gracious words; nothing more is needed.

PRIYAMVADĀ: At least, Sir, do sit down under the spreading shade of this Sapta-parṇa tree, on this cool stone seat and rid yourself of the fatigue of travel.

DUḤṢANTA: You must all be tired too after exerting yourselves in these acts of piety. So please be seated.

PRIYAMVADĀ (*aside*): Dear Śakuntalā, courtesy demands that we keep our guest company. So, come here; we shall all sit down. (*all sit down*)

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*to herself*): How is it that seeing this person, I am overcome by an emotion wholly inappropriate in hermit groves.

DUḤṢANTA (*looking at them*): How charming a friendship this of yours, gracious ladies, all of the same age and equally beautiful!

PRIYAMVADĀ (*aside*): Anasūyā, who could he be – mysterious, majestic in manner, yet he speaks with such easy charm and shows such courtesy?

ANASŪYĀ (*aside*): I am curious too; let me sound him. (*Aloud*) Noble Sir, encouraged by your gracious words, I would like to ask you this: What great lineage does Your Honour adorn—which land now mourns your absence—and what has brought a delicately nurtured noble like yourself on this wearying journey into our Groves of Righteousness?

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*to herself*): O heart, keep calm; Anasūyā is asking what I wanted to know.

DUḤṢANTA (to *himself*): Now what shall I do? Shall I disclose myself—or—shall I conceal my identity? (*Reflecting*) Let me do it this way. (*Aloud*) Lady, I am one well-versed in the Vedas whom the Paurava monarch has appointed as Minister in Charge of Religious Affairs. In the course of visiting the holy retreats I chanced to come to these Groves of Righteousness.

ANASŪYĀ: Why then, the followers of the Right Path have now a guardian.

Śakuntalā shows signs of falling in love.

FRIENDS (*noting the demeanour of Śakuntalā and the King, aside*): Śakuntalā, if only Father were here.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*knitting her brows*): What if he were?

BOTH: He would then make this distinguished guest supremely happy by offering him the sole treasure of his life.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*pretending to be annoyed*): O be quiet; you have some silly notion in your heads and keep prattling; I shan't listen to your nonsense.

DUḤṢANTA: We would also like to ask you something about your friend here, if we may.

BOTH: Consider your request a favour done to us.

DUḤṢANTA: His Holiness Kaṇva has been known to observe perpetual celibacy; how then can your friend be a daughter begotten by him?

ANASŪYĀ: Hear what I have to say, Sir. There is a Royal Sage of great renown belonging to the Kuśika clan.

DUḤṢANTA : Yes, His Holiness Kauśika.

ANASŪYĀ: He is our friend's real father. Father Kaṇva is her father by

virtue of having reared her when he found her abandoned.

DUHṢANTA: Abandoned! The word greatly rouses my curiosity. Pray let me hear the story from the beginning.

ANASŪYĀ: Once, a long time back, that Royal Sage was immersed in the most formidable austerities for many years. The Devas for some reason became nervous and sent the Apsarā Menakā to disturb his single-minded concentration.

DUHṢANTA: O yes, it is well known that Devas often become afraid of the penances of others. Then what happened?

ANASŪYĀ: Spring had just set in; seeing her maddening beauty.... (*stops halfway in embarrassment*)

DUHṢANTA: What followed is easily understood. So—this lady was born of an Apsarā.

ANASŪYĀ: That's right.

DUHṢANTA: It fits:

> How could a form of such matchless beauty 25
> come from the womb of a mortal mother?
> The scintillating lightning-flash
> does not spring up from the earth.

Śakuntalā, shy, looks down.

DUHṢANTA (*to himself*): O what good fortune! Now my desires find a firm footing.

PRIYAMVADĀ (*turning to the King with a smile*): Your Honour was about to say something?

Śakuntalā raises a warning forefinger.

DUHṢANTA: Gracious lady, you have guessed right. Keen to know more about the lives of the saintly, I am eager to ask one further question.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Do not hesitate, Sir; ascetics may be questioned freely.

DUHṢANTA: I wish to ask this:

> Is it only till she is given in marriage 26
> that your friend is strictly bound by hermit-vows
> —an unkind bar that shuts out love—
> or must she dwell, alas, for ever
> with the gazelles so dear to her
> whose lovely eyes mirror
> her own eyes' dear loveliness?

PRIYAMVADĀ: Sir, even in the practice of religious duties, she is dependent on another's will. However, it is her father's resolve to give her in marriage to one worthy of her.

DUḤṢANTA (*to himself*): His resolve is not difficult of realization.

> Hold fast, O heart, to your fondest wish; 27
> the troubling doubts are now dispelled.
> What you dreaded was a burning flame,
> turns out to be a glowing gem to touch and hold.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*pretending anger*): Anasūyā, I am leaving.

ANASŪYĀ: For what reason?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: To report to the revered Mother Gautamī that Priyamvadā is indulging in a lot of meaningless talk. (*rises to go*)

ANASŪYĀ: Surely dear friend, it is not seemly on the part of residents of a hermitage to leave a distinguished guest in this casual manner, before he has received all dues of hospitality.

Without a word, Śakuntalā prepares to leave.

DUḤṢANTA (*aside*) : What! Is she leaving? (*makes a movement to restrain her, then checks himself*) Strange how a lover's actions mirror his feelings.

> Eager to follow the sage's daughter, 28
> decorum forcefully checks my impulse;
> it seems as if I have gone forth and returned
> instantly, yet not stirred from this very spot.

PRIYAMVADĀ (*coming close to Śakuntalā*): Hold, you headstrong girl; you cannot go.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*knitting her eyebrows*): And why not?

PRIYAMVADĀ: You owe me two turns at watering the trees; you promised; keep your promise; then you may leave. (*forces her to turn back*).

DUḤṢANTA: Gracious lady! She looks already exhausted from watering the trees: see how—

> Her shoulders languid, droop; her palms glow reddened 29
> lifting up with her arms the watering-jar;
> even now as she pants, her breasts greatly heave;
> the Śirīṣa blossom adorning her ear
> caught in the sparkling web of beads of sweat,
> ceases its delicate play against her cheek;

with one hand she restrains her hair, straying wild,
unruly, released from its knot undone.

Let me release her from her debt to you, if I may. (*offers his ring*)

The friends reading the name on the signet-ring, look at each other.

DUHṢANTA: O please, do not misunderstand; it is a gift from the king.

PRIYAMVADĀ: More reason then for the ring not to be separated from its finger. Your word is sufficient, Your Honour, to release her from her promise to me. (*aside, turning to Śakuntalā*). You are free now, friend Śakuntalā, through the generosity of the great ...of this noble gentleman. You have been done a favour; be mindful of it.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*to herself*): How can I forget it, even if I would.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Why don't you leave, now? Why linger?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: You may say what you please; I shall leave when I please.

DUHṢANTA (*closely watching Śakuntalā; to himself*): Could it be that she feels towards me as I do towards her? Then my wishes can hope for fulfillment. How:

Even though she mingles no words with mine, 30
she is all ears whenever I speak;
it is true, she faces me not—but then,
what other object do her eyes seek.

A voice in the background :

Ho there! Ascetics all... get ready to protect the creatures in the vicinity of the penance groves ... King Duhṣanta who delights in the chase is in our neighbourhood...

Like swarms of locusts glittering in the sunset glow 31
the whirling dust threshed by tumultuous hoof-beats of horses
falls thick upon the trees in the Hermitage
where wet bark-garments hang from the branches.

DUHṢANTA (*to himself*): Alas! As ill-luck would have it, my armed guards, looking for me are surrounding the penance-groves.

Again the voice off-stage.

Ho there, listen, ascetics all... throwing women, children and the aged into wild confusion, here he comes:

Crazed with fear at the sight of a chariot, 32
scattering terror-stricken antelope-herds,

holding aloft, skewered on one trunk
a branch sliced off a tree by a violent blow,
and in fury dragging along tangled chains
of trailing wild creepers that form fetters round him,
a tusker rampages in our Grove of Righteousness
—the very embodiment of hindrance to penance.

All listen and rise in alarm.

DUḤṢANTA: O what a disaster! How gravely have I wronged the ascetics here; I had better go.

FRIENDS: Noble Lord! We are greatly perturbed hearing these warning cries about the elephant; permit us to return to our cottage.

ANASŪYĀ (*addressing Śakuntalā*): Listen Śakuntalā, Lady Gautamī will be racked by anxiety on our account; come quickly; let's all be together.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*indicating some difficulty in walking*): Ha! A numbness seizes my thighs.

DUḤṢANTA (*quite agitated*): Yes, of course, gentle ladies; by all means leave and go in peace. We too shall take all precautions to prevent any damage to the hermitage.

FRIENDS: Noble lord, by now I think that we know you well enough to feel that you are sure to forgive us for this rude interruption of our welcome. May we request you to visit us again so that we might make amends for the sadly inadequate hospitality extended to you, Your Honour.?

DUḤṢANTA: O, no, that's not true, I am sufficiently honoured by the mere seeing of you, gracious ladies.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: O, Anasūyā, look; my foot has been badly pierced by the needle-like points of the fresh Kuśa grass—and my bark dress has got caught in the twigs of this Kurabaka bush; wait for me; let me free my self.

Finding ways to delay, Śakuntalā finally follows her two friends, gazing all the time at the king.

DUḤṢANTA (*sighing deeply*): They are gone. I too should leave. My keenness to return to the capital is blunted. So, I shall join my companions[10] and set up camp not too far from the Holy grove. How hard it is to tear my thoughts away from Śakuntalā:

My body moves forward—but 33
my heart—a stranger to it—

rushes back—
like a silken pennon
on a chariot's standard,
borne against the wind.

Exit

End of Act One
Entitled
The Chase [e]

ACT TWO

SCENE: The Forest.

Enter Māḍhavya, the vidūṣaka.

MĀḌHAVYA: O, this cruel play of Fate. I am reduced to a state of such misery; and why—because I am the friend and constant companion of the king—he is obsessed with the chase. We rattle along forest trails to the cries of 'here's a deer' and 'there's a boar' – even in the intense heat of the noonday sun in summer—when there is scarcely any shade to be seen. When we are thirsty, what do we drink—phew—the putrid water of mountain streams, tepid, bitter, with rotting leaves floating in them. And for food—we eat at all odd hours—meat most of the time roasted on spits—wolfing it down flaming hot. O, misery upon misery! The bones in my body are all out of joint, galloping without a break on horseback. How can a man sleep well in this state? On top of it all, at the crack of dawn, the beaters with their pack of hounds—those sons of bitches, all of them, are up—getting everybody up for the day's hunt. I am rudely awakened by the ear-splitting cacophony of their halloos. But is that the end of the story—no Sir, no indeed. What do you know—the lump has sprouted a boil.[11] Only yesterday, speeding along, His Majesty left us all far behind and went straight into the Hermitage running after a deer. Then, what happened—as my ill-luck would have it, he chanced upon a beautiful hermit girl—Śakuntalā is the name. From that moment,

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e. The chase is a significant metaphor in the play, see *A note on Texts and Translations.*

sirs, the very idea of returning to the capital finds no place in his thoughts. Dawn broke this morning on his sleepless lids—thinking of her alone. What remedy do we have? At any rate, I shall look out for him as soon as he finishes his morning rituals. Ah! What do I see here comes His Majesty, bow in hand,—lost in thought—thinking of his beloved—and wearing garlands of wild flowers, shall I approach him now? (*moves a little towards the king*) No, no, this is what I shall do, I shall stand right here—drooping, bent down—as if my body were all broken, with no strength left in it. Maybe, may...be... this will bring me some respite (*stands supporting himself on his staff*)

Enter the king as described.

DUHṢANTA (*lost in deep thought, sighs, speaks to himself*): Aah!

> Deeply loved, she is not easy to win; 1
> but watching her ways, my heart is consoled;
> though love has not found fulfillment yet,
> mutual longing is itself a pleasure.

(*smiling wryly*) Thus indeed does a lover mock himself wishing to believe his beloved's thoughts and feelings reflect his own. However:

> That tender glance — the melting glow in her eyes, 2
> though she directed them elsewhere—
> her steps languid from the weight of heavy hips,
> that seemed love's response patterned in enticing grace—
> those words she spoke in scorn when her friend held her back,
> saying 'don't go': all this I fancied
> had only me for an object—
> But alas! Love sees only Himself everywhere.

MĀḌHAVYA (*stands without moving a step*): My friend, my hands are powerless to extend themselves in greeting; I salute Your Honour with words only: May you be ever-victorious!

DUHṢANTA (*looks at him smiling*): And what has paralysed your limbs?

MĀḌHAVYA: A fine thing to ask; do you hit me in the eye—and then ask why it is watering?

DUHṢANTA: My dear friend, I do not follow; make your meaning clear.

MĀḌHAVYA: If the bent reed[12] by the stream totters to and fro with the grace of a hunchback's gait, is the cause its own will—or—the force of the stream's flow?

DUHṢANTA: Why, in the case of the reed the force of the stream's flow is the cause, certainly.

MĀḌHAVYA: So, are you, in mine, certainly.

DUḤṢANTA: How is that?

MĀḌHAVYA (*as if angry*): Go on; you abandon the affairs of the kingdom; you give up those places where one walks without slipping and you stick around here enamoured of the primitive life of foresters, it seems. To tell you the truth, my limbs feel as if they are not my own, so bruised and painful are their joints with galloping daily chasing after wild beasts. Do me a favour please; let us rest at least for one day.

DUḤṢANTA (*to himself*): This fellow speaks my own thoughts. My mind is not on the chase either, thinking of Kaṇva's daughter. For:

> I cannot bear to draw my well-strung bow 3
> with its perfectly-aimed arrows on these deer
> that dwell always beside my own dear love
> and bestow on her the loveliness of their eyes.

MĀḌHAVYA (*looking at the King*): You look as if you are communing with your heart; mine was just a cry in the wilderness then?

DUḤṢANTA (*trying to smile*): Thinking that a friend's words ought not to be ignored, I was silent; that was all.

MĀḌHAVYA: May you live long. (*prepares to leave.*)

DUḤṢANTA: No, stay, I haven't finished what I was going to say.

MĀḌHAVYA: Command me, my lord.

DUḤṢANTA: After you have rested well, Sir, I would like your help in a matter that will not cause you the least bit of exertion.

MĀḌHAVYA: Like tasting sweet dumplings perhaps?

DUḤṢANTA: I shall let you know.

MĀḌHAVYA: I am at your disposal.

DUḤṢANTA: Ho there — who is on duty?

Enter the Guard

GUARD: Your Majesty's command?

DUḤṢANTA: Raivataka, let His Lordship, the General, be asked to attend.

RAIVATAKA: As my Royal Master commands.

Goes out and returns with the General.

GENERAL (*looking at the king*): Much abused though the sport of hunting is, in the case of our Royal Master, it has all been to the good. Just see our great lord:

He carries his magnificent frame 4
like a tusker that roams the mountains;
a frame spare, instinct with energy,
the sinewy strength hides the loss of rounding flesh;
he endures the sun's hot rays unharmed,
not a trace of sweat showing;
his brawny chest and arms are hard and scored
by the ceaseless recoil of his twanging bowstring.

RAIVATAKA: Sir, His Majesty is looking fixedly in your direction, as if impatient to give you his commands. Let Your Honour approach.

GENERAL (*approaches the King, bowing low*): Hail, Victory to our Royal Master. The beasts of prey have been tracked down to their lairs deep in the forest. Why then does my lord stay?

DUHṢANTA: Lord Bhadrasena, Māḍhavya here has been reviling the chase so bitterly that my ardour for it is cooling off.

BHADRASENA (*aside*): Māḍhavya, be firm in your opposition; in the meantime, I shall follow the bent of my Royal Master's mind. (*aloud*) My Lord, this blockhead doesn't know what he is talking about. Your Royal Highness is a prime example of the benefits of the chase.

The body light, manly, ready for action, 5
trim in the waist, fat melted away; knowledge gained
of changing responses of woodland creatures
seized by fear or anger;
the archer's elation as arrows hit perfectly the moving mark:
falsely indeed is the chase cursed as a vice;[13]
is there another sport so excellent as this?

MĀḌHAVYA (*angrily*): Go away; His Majesty is now recovering his true nature; as for you, you may please yourself roaming from one forest to another until like a witless jackal you walk right into the jaws of some old bear.

DUHṢANTA: Bhadrasena, we are in the vicinity of the Hermitage; therefore I cannot really applaud these words of yours. For the present, my good lord;

Let bisons plunge into forest-pools and revel splashing, 6
striking the water repeatedly with their mighty horns;
let the herds of antelopes clustering in groups in the shade,
chew the cud undisturbed;
and let wild boars lining up round puddles
where the marsh-sedge grows fragrant,
root peacefully in the mud:

and let this my bow with its loose-knotted string
be allowed to enjoy its well-earned repose.

BHADRASENA: So please Your Royal Highness, your wish is my command.

DUḤṢANTA: Let the beaters hemming in the game be recalled then; and let my soldiers now encamped in the environs of the holy groves encircling them from far, be ordered to withdraw. Mark you:

Like sun-crystals[14] cool to the touch 7
vomit fiery sparks from deep within
if struck by another luminous power,
so, hermits rich in holiness
in whom Tranquillity presides,
have hidden deep a blazing energy
that leaps out to burn when aroused.

MĀḌHAVYA: Now, you inciter of strong passions, be off with you and quickly.

BHADRASENA (*bowing to the king*): As our Royal Master commands (*exits*)

DUḤṢANTA (*to his attendants*) : Ladies, you may divest yourselves of your hunting costumes; and you too, Raivataka, see that your place of duty does not remain empty.

RAIVATAKA: As the Great Lord commands. (*exits*)

MĀḌHAVYA (*laughing*): So, now that Your Honour has rid himself of these gadflies, do me a favour; sit comfortably on the sheltered seat under the spreading shade of that tree that is canopied by the network of flowering vines, so that I may also sit down and rest in comfort.

DUḤṢANTA: Lead the way.

MĀḌHAVYA: This way, my lord. (*both turn around and sit down.*)

DUḤṢANTA: Ah! My friend Māḍhavya, your eyes have not as yet been richly feasted as they should be; for you have not seen what is truly worth seeing.

MĀḌHAVYA: How do you say that? Is Your Honour not right here before my eyes?

DUḤṢANTA: Everyone considers the person dear to him as most worth seeing. But, I am referring to her....to Sakuntala, that exquisite ornament of the Hermitage.

MĀḌHAVYA (*aside*): I shall not give him room to expatiate on this theme. (*to the king*) Now listen, Your Honour, if she is a hermit-girl beyond your reach, is there any point in seeing her?

DUḤṢANTA: O, you blockhead!

Why does the world gaze with upturned faces 8
and unblinking eyes on the new moon's slim crescent?

Besides, my friend, surely you are well aware that Duḥṣanta's mind is never drawn to any object forbidden to him by the Law.

MĀḌHAVYA: Well, would you kindly explain that statement to me?

DUṢḤANTA:

Like a flower of the fragrant white jasmine 9
parted from its parent stalk to drop
on the palm of an Arka leaf, she,
sprung from a lovely Apsarā mother, we hear,
and abandoned, is the sage's daughter
only because he found her and reared her.

MĀḌHAVYA (*laughing merrily*): Oh! So that's how it is, is it? Like one whose palate jaded by enjoying delicate candies made of sweetest dates hankers after a taste of sour tamarind, you too, Sir, are sated with the pleasures of the Inner Apartments in the palace full of beauties, each one a gem...you are consumed by this passion for a hermit-girl.

DUḤṢANTA: It is only because you haven't seen her that you speak of her in this manner.

MĀḌHAVYA: O, Sir, to arouse such breathless admiration in *you*... hm ... she must indeed be a miracle of beauty!

DUḤṢANTA: Ah! My friend, why speak at length?

Contemplating Brahmā's Imaging power ineffable, 10
and her loveliness exquisite,
she flashes on my eye, a jewel among women
of another order of creation, extraordinary;
it is as if the mighty Creator gathering
the rarest elements of beauty,
first drew the likeness of perfection,
then quickened it with the Breath of Life.

MĀḌHAVYA: In that case, she must put to shame all other beauties of all time, I guess.

DUḤṢANTA: And this thought haunts my mind:

A flower whose fragrance has not been inhaled; 11
a tender shoot uncut by sharp nails and marred;
fresh honey that no lip has tasted with relish;
a glowing gem unviolated; I wonder
what fortunate mortal in this world has Fate chosen
as the enjoyer of such flawless beauty,

rewarding him with the fruit entire
of meritorious acts performed in countless births.

MĀḌHAVYA: For that very reason, go quickly, hurry, Sir, and rescue her before she falls into the hands of some forest-dwelling hermit with greasy head and hair plastered down with Iṅgudi oil.

DUḤṢANTA: Ah! But the lady is not mistress of herself; and her parent is not in the Hermitage at present.

MĀḌHAVYA: Now tell me—what are her feelings towards you? Did her eyes express any hint of love?

DUḤṢANTA: You know, my friend, hermit- girls are shy and retiring by nature; yet:

When I turned towards her she turned her gaze away: 12
her smiles seemed the prologue to some other play;
with her demeanour thus veiled by modesty,
love neither shone radiant nor was it concealed.

MĀḌHAVYA (*laughing*): What Sir! Did you then expect her to leap into your arms as soon as she set eyes on Your Honour?

DUḤṢANTA: As she was leaving though, with her friends, her feelings were amply manifest; How?

Having gone some steps, she stopped, 13
unexpectedly, exclaiming,
"Ah! My foot is pricked by a darbhā-blade";
sylph-like she stood, still,
turning towards me, busy disentangling the bark-garment
that was certainly not caught on the twigs of any shrub.

MĀḌHAVYA: I see it all now; I see it quite clearly. I trust you have laid in a good stock of provisions. For it looks as if you have turned this penance grove into a pleasure garden.

DUḤṢANTA: My friend, can you not come up with some pretext or other that will gain us entry into the Hermitage once more?

MĀḌHAVYA: Hm...now...let me think; but do not break my concentration with any of your false lamentations. (*as if deep in thought*) Ah! I have it. Why think of some pretext? Are you not the King?

DUḤṢANTA: Yes, so what of it?

MĀḌHAVYA: Go right in and demand your one-sixth share of wild rice from the hermits.

DUḤṢANTA: They pay a tribute far richer than a heap of priceless gems

for the protection we provide them; and we cherish that far more. Think:

Perishable is the fruit of the yield 14
raised from the Realm's Four Estates;
but imperishable is that sixth part[15]
the hermits give us of their holiness.

VOICES (*offstage*): Good, we have succeeded in our search.

DUHṢANTA (*listening*): From their calm, resonant tones, these must be hermits.

Enter the Guard, Raivataka.

RAIVATAKA: Victory to my Royal Lord; here are two young hermits at the entrance.

DUHṢANTA: Usher them in without delay.

RAIVATAKA: I shall announce them at once.

Enter two young hermits with the Guard.

RAIVATAKA: This way, come this way, honourable sirs.

FIRST HERMIT (*seeing the king*): How admirable! His person radiates such majesty; yet one feels at ease. But that is not surprising in a king who is almost a sage.[16]

He has embraced the worldly life 15
that all must lead to be of use to the world;
he too practices the Yoga of protection
and garners for himself each day
the purest merit of holy rites;
with all passions under perfect control
and controlling the world's Righteous Way,
to him belongs that hallowed praise-word, Sage,
merely prefixed with the attribute —Royal—
the praise-word so often chanted
by pairs of celestial minstrels
to resound in the Realms of Light.

SECOND HERMIT: Gautama, *this is Duhṣanta*? Friend to Indra, the Destroyer of powerful Vala?[17]

FIRST HERMIT: Who else?

SECOND:

What wonder then that this heroic king 16
with arms strong as massive iron beams

that bar the city's great gates should hold
single sway over the All-Supporting Earth
bounded by the dark-blue oceans?
For the celestials, when the battle lines are drawn
against the fierce Dānavas they encounter,
hope for victory only from his taut-drawn bow
and the clashing thunders of Indra, oft-invoked in sacrifices.

HERMITS (*approaching*): With our blessings, Sir (*offer fruits*).

DUHṢANTA (*rises from his seat with respect*): I welcome you, holy hermits. (*accepts the offering with a deep bow, then sits down*) I am eager to know what has brought you here.

HERMITS: The residents of this Hermitage hearing that you are in the neighbourhood address this request to you.

DUHṢANTA: What are their commands?

HERMITS: In the absence of His Holiness, the Patriarch, demons will begin disturbing the performance of our sacred rites. Therefore they request that you with your charioteer come in and stay for some nights in the Hermitage to guard it.

DUHṢANTA: I am honoured to be asked.

MĀḌHAVYA (*aside*): Good Fortune seizes you by the throat, Sir?

DUHṢANTA: Raivataka; go, tell the charioteer to bring round the chariot and my bow and quiver.

RAIVATAKA: As Your Highness commands. (*goes off*)

HERMITS (*expressing great satisfaction*):

The Puru monarchs were first and foremost 17
consecrated protectors of those in distress;
as befits your noble descent, O King,
you now duly follow in their footsteps.

DUHṢANTA: Go first, Holy Sirs; I shall follow close on your heels.

HERMITS: May victory always attend on you. (*exit*)

DUHṢANTA: Māḍhavya, are you not eager to see Śakuntalā?

MĀḌHAVYA: At first, Yes; I was ... with eagerness that was brimming over; but... (*looks fearful*) at the mention of the word 'demons', not a drop of it remains.

DUHṢANTA: O, you shouldn't be afraid; you will naturally stay close to me.

MĀḌHAVYA: A protector of your chariot wheels[18], you mean?

Enter the Guard.

RAIVATAKA: Your Majesty, the chariot is ready and awaits my lord's triumphal setting out. But....Karabhaka has also arrived ...from the Queen's[a] Royal Presence.

DUḤṢANTA (*in a reverential tone of voice*): From our most honoured mother?

RAIVATAKA: Yes, My Lord.

DUḤṢANTA: He should have been shown in immediately.

RAIVATAKA: I shall do so at once, My Lord. (*goes out*)

Enter Karabhaka with the doorkeeper.

KARABHAKA (*approaches*): Hail, hail to His Majesty. The Queen-Mother's command runs as follows, Sire: "On the fourth day after today I shall break the fast that I have undertaken, the fast known as 'The Safeguarding of the Son's Succession'. My long-lived son[18] should be by my side on that solemn occasion without fail."

DUḤṢANTA: Madhavya, look at me; on the one hand I am bound to honour my commitments to the holy sages; on the other the command of a revered parent is laid on me. Neither obligation may be ignored with impunity. How do we cope with such a situation?

MĀḌHAVYA (*laughing*): Hang in between, suspended in mid-air like Triśanku[19].

DUḤṢANTA: I am truly perplexed.

> Required to perform duties in places 18
> widely separated, I am in two minds,
> like a river that strikes a hill in mid-course,
> and forced back parts into two streams.

(*after reflecting*) Māḍhavya, my friend, you have always been accepted as a son by our mother; so—you could leave now, return to the Capital and acquaint Her Majesty with my deep involvement in the affairs of the Hermitage; you could also take my place at the ceremony and carry out all the ritual duties that a son has to perform, for Her Majesty.

MĀḌHAVYA: You don't say that because you think that I am afraid of demons, do you?

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a. The Queen - Mother is meant.

DUḤṢANTA: O no, O, Great Brāhmaṇa; you—afraid? That is inconceivable.

MĀḌHAVYA: Well then, I shall leave; but I must travel in a manner befitting the younger brother of the king.

DUḤṢANTA: Indeed you shall, my friend. I shall have my whole retinue accompany you, so that it will no longer be a disquieting presence in the Holy Groves.

MĀḌHAVYA (*struts around proudly*): Ha, I feel already like the Crown Prince.

DUḤṢANTA (*to himself*): This fellow tends to prattle. He may blurt out something about my interest in Śakuntalā to the ladies in the Royal Apartments. That will not do at all. I should put a different complexion on the whole matter (*takes Māḍhavya by the hand and speaks to him*) My friend, listen carefully to me. I am going into the Hermitage solely out of esteem for the sages, to help them. I have no real interest in the hermit-maiden; just a whim, you know. For you can very well see that:

> Between our royal self and that simple girl, 19
> a stranger to love, bred among gentle fawns as one of them,
> lies a world of difference; do not my friend,
> take in earnest what was spoken merely in jest.

MĀḌHAVYA: Is that all?

Exit all.

End of Act Two
Entitled
Concealment of the Telling

ACT THREE

PRELUDE[20]

SCENE: The Hermitage of Kaṇva.

Enter one of his pupils.

PUPIL (*with admiration*): O what a mighty monarch Duḥṣanta is! No sooner

had he entered our Hermitage than all our sacred rites became completely free of all unexpected disturbances.

Why tell a long tale of arrows aimed and shot; 1
by the mere twang of the bowstring from afar
as if his bow spoke quivering with rage, he made
all hindrances flee the scene terrified.

Now let me gather Kuśa-grass and take it to the priest to strew on the altar.

Walks around, notices someone and speaks in the air.

Ho there! Priyamvadā, say, for whom are you carrying these lotus leaves on their tender stalks? And the cooling balsam of the fragrant Uśīra-root? (*As if listening to a reply*) What did you say? O, that Śakuntalā has suffered a heat-stroke? That these things are to cool her burning frame? Priyamvadā, listen, let her be looked after with the greatest care, for she is the very life-breath of the Patriarch. I shall also send some hallowed water used for the Sacrifice with Gautamī; it will soothe her. (*exits*)

END OF THE PRELUDE

SCENE: The Sacred Grove.

Enter the King deeply in love.

DUḤṢANTA (*pensive, sighing*):

I know well the Holy Power immense of penance; 2
that young girl is dependent on another's will,
I know that well; but my heart is powerless to return
like water that has already flowed downwards.

O, glorious divinity, Churner of Hearts. How is it that your weapons described as flowers are in truth so sharp? (*as if remembering something*) O, yes, I know why;

Śiva's fiery wrath must still burn within you 3
like fire smouldering in the Ocean's depths.
Were it not so how can you burn lovers like me
when all that was left of you was a mere handful of ashes?[21]

And further: We of the brotherhood of love are cruelly deceived by you and by the Moon—though we put our trust in you. And why do I say this?

That flowers are your arrows; that moonbeams are cool— 4
such statements sound hollow to us lovers.
The Moon's rays pregnant with ice shoot darts of fire;
your arrows are tipped with hardest adamant.

But let's look at it another way:

Even if you drive me to distraction, Dolphin- 5
bannered Lord,[22]
with unsleeping anguish, I would still welcome you,
if you would assail her as well with your darts—
Ah! That lovely girl with long, bewitching eyes!

O lord, glorious divinity, though reproached bitterly you are not moved by compassion.

Wantonly have I let you grow immensely, 6
O, Love, Bodiless One!
Assiduously have I nourished you
with a hundred holy rites and sentiments.
Now you draw your bent bow right back to your ear!
It is at *me* that you aim to let your arrow fly!

Now that the ascetics, free of impediments to their penances have given me permission to leave, where can I find solace for my weary heart? (*sighs deeply*) What other refuge have I but the beloved's presence? (*looking up*) At this hour when the noonday sun blazes down with cruel heat, Lady Śakuntalā and her friends usually retire to the Mālinī's banks where flowering vines form shady bowers. Well, that's where I'll go. (*turns and looks*). I can tell that the beautiful girl has just passed through this avenue of young trees. For:

The cups of flowers she has just plucked 7
have not as yet sealed themselves.
These tender shoots, broken off,
are still moist with milky sap.

(*indicates pleasure at the touch of the breeze*): Aha! How delightful is the breeze here in the woodlands.

This breeze that wafts the fragrances of lotuses 8
with the cool spray of Mālinī's rippling stream
is able to soothe love-fevered limbs
enfolding them in a close embrace.

(*walking a few more steps, notices something*): Ah! Śakuntalā must be here in the arbour of overhanging vines encircled by a screen of

reeds; it is plain to see,

At its entrance dusted with pale river sand, 9
a line of footsteps clearly etched, lightly marked
in front by her toes and indented deeply behind
by her heels weighed down by wide heavy hips.

Let me take a look through these twining stems. (*peering in, exclaims with rapture*) My eyes look upon Paradise; there she is – the beloved of my dreams, reclining on a stone slab strewn with flowers; her friends are with her. Let me hear what they say in their private conversation.

The scene discovers Śakuntalā with her friends, as described.

FRIENDS (*fanning her tenderly*): Dear Śakuntalā, does the breeze raised by these cooling lotus leaves soothe you?

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*too distressed to notice anything*): What! Are my dear friends fanning me? (*her friends look at each other in dismay*).

DUḤṢANTA: Lady Śakuntalā does appear greatly indisposed. (*musing awhile*) I wonder if it is the summer heat that is the real cause of her distress? Or, is it what I think it is. (*reflecting for a moment*) O, well, no more doubts on this score:

With Uśīra balm spread thick over her breasts 10
and a single bracelet of tender lotus stalks
hanging pale and withered on her wrist,
my beloved's body though racked with pain........
Ah! How exquisite it looks in its pale loveliness.
Summer's heat, it's true can strike as savage as love......
But....to burn young girls into such splendour...
I cannot think *that* lies in Summer's power.

PRIYAMVADĀ (*aside*): Anasūyā, ever since she first saw the Royal Sage, Śakuntalā has been restless and dejected. There can be no other cause for her sickness.

ANASŪYĀ: I suspected as much myself. Very well; I'll ask her. Śakuntalā, dear friend, I wish to ask you something.....see how your limbs are simply burning.

DUḤṢANTA: Quite so:

Those bracelets of plaited lotus-fibre 11
bright as moonbeams, fading fast and turning brown
speak of the fever unendurable
coursing like fire through her limbs.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*raising herself a little*): What did you wish to ask me, dear Anasūyā?

ANASŪYĀ: Listen, dear Śakuntalā, we cannot enter your mind and read your thoughts but we feel that the state you are in is like that of persons experiencing the pangs of love as described in romantic tales. So be frank, tell us the cause of your distress. Without knowing the nature of an illness how can a cure be found for it?

DUḤṢANTA: Anasūyā's thinking runs on similar lines to mine.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Yes indeed, I am deeply distressed; but it is not something that I find easy to talk about.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Dearest Śakuntalā, Anasūyā is perfectly right in what she says, you know that. Why are you hiding the cause of your distress? You are wasting away day by day; all that is left of you is the delicate glow of your loveliness – like the lustre of fine pearls.[23]

DUḤṢANTA: Priyamvadā is hardly exaggerating; one has only to look at her;

Wan face, sunken cheeks, 12
breasts that have lost their firm shapeliness,
shoulders drooping despondent,
the slender waist grown more slender,
complexion pallid –
Ah! How woebegone she appears!
Limp, struck by love's maddening passion,
yet how lovely–a Mādhavī[a], its leaves touched by a scorching wind!

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*sighing*): Whom else can I speak to of my heartache? But it will be a source of anxiety for you both.

FRIENDS: That is why we insist on knowing what is wrong. Grief shared is easier to bear.

DUḤṢANTA:

Questioned by friends who share her joys and sorrows 13
the hapless girl cannot but disclose
the ache hidden deep within her heart.
But, though I saw her turn round many a time
and gaze at me with hungering eyes
my heart now beats........
like a coward's, fearing
the answer she might give.

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a. The Spring Jasmine

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*shyly*): From the moment that Royal Sage who is the protector of the Penance Groves came within my sight........(*she breaks off overcome by bashfulness*).

FRIENDS: Go on, dear, tell us.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: From that moment I am pining with love for him.

FRIENDS: Fortunately, you have set your heart on one truly worthy of you. But that is no surprise. Where else would a great river flow except to the ocean!

DUḤṢANTA (*in rapture*): I have heard what I longed to hear.

> Like days at summer's close darkening with rain clouds 14
> bring welcome relief to the living world,
> love, the creator of my anguish
> now comes bearing sweet comfort.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Dear friends, if you approve, counsel me as to how to find favour in the eyes of the Royal Sage. Otherwise, I shall soon be a mere memory.

DUḤṢANTA: Her words have removed all my doubts.

PRIYAMVADĀ (*aside*): Anasūyā, she is too far gone in love; she cannot brook any further delay in the fulfillment of her desires.

ANASŪYĀ: Priyamvadā, what plan can we devise to fulfill our friend's desires, secretly and without delay?

PRIYAMVADĀ: Hmmm....without delay....yes....that's easy.

But....secretly...that requires some serious thought.

ANASŪYĀ: How so?

PRIYAMVADĀ: The Royal Sage looks at her with such tenderness in his eyes. Further, did you note that these days he looks rather wasted...as if he spends wakeful nights.

DUḤṢANTA: O, how right she is; such is my state:

> As I lie night after night, 15
> my cheek pillowed upon my arm,
> hot tears welling up
> from the anguish deep within
> dull the brilliance of these gems
> set in this gold armlet that slips down the forearm
> unimpeded by the welt raised by my bowstring,
> every time I push it up from my wrist.

PRIYAMVADĀ (*reflecting for a moment*): Listen, let's do it this way. Let

Śakuntalā write the king a love letter. Hiding it under some flowers, I shall pretend that they are part of the offerings made to the divinities and somehow manage to give it to him.

ANASŪYĀ: It seems a pretty plan; I like it. But what does our Śakuntalā say to it?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Can your arrangements be questioned?

PRIYAMVADĀ: Allright. Now you think of an elegant lyric that'll convey your deep feelings for the king.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Yes, I can think of something. But, my heart trembles at the thought of being rebuffed.

DUḤṢANTA:

He whom you fear would spurn you, O, timid girl, 16
stands here yearning to enfold you in his arms.
The man who woos Fortune may win her – or he may not.
But does Fortune ever fail to win the man she woos?

Further:

Longing for your love, the man you wrongly assume 17
as one who would spurn that love
is here, close to you, beautiful girl!
A gem is sought for; it does not seek.

FRIENDS: O, you who belittles her own worth, who on earth will be so foolish as to draw a curtain against the autumnal moonlight streaming in!

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*smiling*): I am admonished.

DUḤṢANTA (*to himself*): My eyes forget to blink while I stand gazing on my beloved. And it is no wonder, for see how:

With one raised eyebrow curved deep as a tendril 18
as she shapes her feelings into words,
her face, a blush mantling her cheek, proclaims
the passionate love she feels for me.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Dear friends, I have a little song running through my head; but there are no writing-materials at hand to set it down.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Why don't you incise the words with your nail on this lotus leaf soft as a parrot's downy breast?

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*does so*): There, now listen to it and tell me if the words are well chosen to convey my feelings.

FRIENDS: Read on, we are all attention.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*reading*)[24]:

I do not know your heart; 19
but my nights and days,
O, pitiless man
are haunted by love
as every part of me
yearns to be one with you.

DUḤṢANTA (*coming out at once*):

Love burns you, true, my slender girl! 20
But me, He consumes utterly—relentless;
Day wipes out the moon[25] from view—
it does not fade the moon lotus.

FRIENDS (*rising with the greatest joy*): Welcome, welcome to the immediate answer to our inmost wish. (*Śakuntalā tries to get up too*)

DUḤṢANTA: Fair lady, no, no, do not exert yourself.

Your limbs aflame with pain, that bite 21
into the bed of flowers, fading fast
the bracelets of lotus stalks need not
bend in the customary courtesies.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*thrown into confusion, to herself*): O my heart, are you so overcome that you find nothing to say?

ANASŪYĀ: Let His Majesty grace one end of this stone slab.

Śakuntalā moves away a little.

DUḤṢANTA (*sitting down*): Priyamvadā, I trust your friend's fever is somewhat abated.

PRIYAMVADĀ (*with a smile*): With the right medicine at hand it ought to improve, Sir. Your Majesty, the love you bear to each other is plain to see. But the love I bear my friend prompts me to say something.

DUḤṢANTA: Say what is on your mind, gracious lady. What is intended to be said, if left unsaid, becomes a matter of regret later.

PRIYAMVADĀ : Well, I shall say it then, Your Honour. It is the duty of the king to relieve the sufferings of the residents of a Hermitage...hm?

DUḤṢANTA: What higher duty can there be?

PRIYAMVADĀ: The god of love, mighty as he is, has reduced our dear friend here to this state for love of you. You are bound therefore to sustain her life by taking her.

DUḤṢANTA: Dear lady, this is a mutual wish and entreaty. I am most

highly favoured.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*with a smile but feigning annoyance*): That's enough, Priyamvadā, do not hold back the good king who must be impatient to return to the Inner Apartments[26] of the Royal Palace.

DUḤṢANTA:

O, lady enshrined in my heart! 22
If you consider my heart devoted
to none but you, as something otherwise,
then think of me slain once by the fatal arrow
of the god who makes men mad, as slain once more,
O girl, whose glances pour into me like delicious wine!

ANASŪYĀ: Friend,[27] one hears that kings have many loves. Pray act in such a manner as not to bring sorrow and bitter tears to her kinsfolk.

DUḤṢANTA: Gracious lady:

Though many a wife may grace our palace-courts, 23
none but two shall ever be the glory
and mainstay of our race—the Earth[28]
sea-girdled and this lady, your friend,

Śakuntalā is filled with happiness.

PRIYAMVADĀ (*aside*): Anasūyā, just observe our dear friend; see how she revives each minute like a pea-hen that feels the touch of the breeze blowing from fresh rain clouds.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Listen, friends, beg the Protector of the Earth's pardon for what might have been spoken among ourselves that went beyond the bounds of propriety.

FRIENDS (*smiling*): Well, well. Whoever said something of the sort should beg his pardon; is anyone else to blame?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Please forgive whatever was said among ourselves. People say many things behind a person's back.

DUḤṢANTA (*smiling*):

I may overlook the offence, 24
O girl with tapering thighs!
If, out of kindness, you offer me a place
on this bed of flowers
sweet from the touch of your limbs,
to allay my weariness.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Would that be sufficient to make her happy?

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*with a show of being peeved*): Stop it, you naughty girl; How dare you tease me...the state I am in.

ANASŪYĀ (*glancing outside*): Priyamvadā, look, this little fawn is anxiously searching here and there...must be looking for his mother...he seems to have lost her; let me take him to her.

PRIYAMVADĀ: O, this little one....he is like quicksilver, nimble and wayward, my friend; you are no match for him single-handed. Let me help you.

They prepare to leave.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Friends, dear friends, do not leave me alone; let one of you go. I am helpless with no one to turn to.

FRIENDS (*smiling*): He whom the whole world turns to for help is by your side. (*they leave*)

ŚAKUNTALĀ: What, have they gone already...and left me alone?

DUḤṢANTA: My love, do not be uneasy. Am I not near you, your suitor who adores you utterly? Now, tell me:

Shall I raise cool breezes, waving over you 25
these broad lotus-leaf fans, moist and refreshing,
to relieve your languid weariness?
Shall I place your lotus-pink feet on my lap,
O lady with beautiful tapering thighs!
And press them tenderly to ease your pain?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: I shall not bring dishonour on those whom I should honour.[29]

She gets up to leave; the king bars her way and addresses her.

DUḤṢANTA : Beautiful girl! The day is not cool as yet; look at the condition you are in.

Leaving your couch of flowers, throwing off 26
the cool wrap of lotus leaves placed on your breasts,
your delicate body all worn out with pain,
how will you brave this fierce noonday heat?

Saying this the king forces her to turn around; Śakuntalā without a word, prepares to leave.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Let go of me—release me; I am not free to do as I please. But what can I do when I have only my friends to help me?

DUḤṢANTA: O misery! You make me feel ashamed of myself.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: I don't mean to, Your Majesty; I am just blaming my Fate.

DUḤṢANTA: Why do you rail against a Fate that is favourable to you?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: And why won't I rail against my fate that tempts me when I am not my own mistress, with feelings not my own.[30]

DUḤṢANTA (*to himself*):

> It is not Love who torments virgins [31] to gain his ends, 27
> it is they who torment Love, letting the moment slip by;
> great though their own eagerness, shrinking
> from the advances of the beloved;
> and fearful of yielding their bodies
> though longing for the pleasure of union.

Śakuntalā leaves.

DUḤṢANTA: What! Shall I not please myself? (*advances and seizes her by her garment*).

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*with a show of anger*): Paurava![b] Act with decorum; ascetics constantly move about here.

DUḤṢANTA: Fair Lady! Such fear of your elders? His Holiness Kaṇva is well versed in the Law; you will not cause him any distress. Listen,

> Many are the daughters of sages, we hear, 28
> who were married by the Gandharva-rite;[32]
> once married they were felicitated
> by their fathers with joyful acceptance.

(*looking around*) What! I have walked into the open, have I? (*lets go of Śakuntalā and retraces his steps.*)

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*takes a step forward, turns around; bending*) : Paurava! Even though your wishes remain unfulfilled and you know me only through conversation, do not forget me.

DUḤṢANTA: My beautiful girl!

> However far you may go from me, 29
> you shall never go from my heart,
> as the shadow of the tree at evening
> never leaves its base on the eastern side.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*going a little way, to herself*): Alas! What shall I do? Hearing these words my feet refuse to move forward. Let me hide behind this amaranth hedge and observe how his feelings incline. (*stands still*)

DUḤṢANTA: How could you go off like this, my love, without a thought

b. Ruler of Puru's dynasty.

forsaking me whose unchangeable love is for you and for you only.

How delicate is your body to be loved most gently! 30
and how hard your heart like the stalk of the Śirīṣa-flower!

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Ah! Hearing this I am powerless to leave.

DUḤṢANTA: What shall I do now in this bower, empty of my beloved's presence? (*looking in front*) O, what's this... my way is barred.

This bright bracelet of lotus-stalks fragrant 31
with Uśīra-balm from her body
lies here before me, fallen from her wrist
to become a chain round my heart.

He picks it up adoringly.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*looking at her arm*): O dear, the bracelet....weak, it had become loose. It must have dropped down without my noticing.

DUḤṢANTA (*placing the bracelet on his breast*): O for its touch!

This charming ornament of yours, my love, 32
having left your lovely arm to rest here,
consoles this unhappy man more than you have,
though it is only an insentient thing.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Ha! I cannot hold back any longer. Using this bracelet as a pretext, I shall discover myself. (*approaches the king*)

DUḤṢANTA (*seeing her he is overjoyed*): Ah! Here is the lady who is my very life; no sooner had I begun to lament than Fate came to my aid to do me a favour.

Parched with thirst, the bird[c] has only to crave for water 33
and shower from a fresh rain-cloud falls into its mouth.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*standing before the king*): Sire, when I was half-way I remembered the bracelet that had slipped off my arm; I have come back for it knowing in my heart that you would have taken it. Let me have it back lest it betray us both to the sages.

DUḤṢANTA: Well...I'll give it back on one condition.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: And what's that?

DUḤṢANTA: That I myself restore it to the place it once occupied.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*to herself*): There's no way out. (*comes closer to him*).

DUḤṢANTA: Let's sit here on this same stone slab. (*they both turn around and sit; he takes hold of Śakuntalā's hand*) O, to feel such a touch!

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c. The cātaka.

Has Fate rained down a shower ambrosial 34
to make the tree of love
once burnt to ashes by Śiva's wrath
put forth a fresh shoot once more?

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*feeling the touch of his hand*): Quickly, hurry up, my revered lord[d].

DUHṢANTA (*filled with happiness, to himself*) : How this inspires confidence in me; for she has addressed me by the word used for a husband in speaking. (*aloud*) Listen sweetheart, the ends of this bracelet of lotus-stalks are not joined very firmly; if you permit me, I'll re-do it.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*with a smile*): If you wish.

DUHṢANTA (*artfully delays and finally fixes the bracelet*): Now, look, lovely girl!

Leaving the sky in search of richer beauty, 35
the new moon in the form of lotus-stems,
joining the points of its crescent, has placed itself
on your arm lovely as a syāmā-vine.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: I cannot see very well; the pollen-dust from the lily at my ear, shaken by the breeze has fallen into my eye blurring it.

DUHṢANTA (*with a smile*): If you permit me, I can blow it away.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: That would be kind...but....what if I don't trust you?

DUHṢANTA: Why not? A new servant does not overstep his master's instructions.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: It is just this excess of gallantry that I cannot quite trust.

DUHṢANTA (*to himself*) : I am certainly not going to pass up an opportunity so pleasant – ministering to her comfort. (*about to raise her face up to his, Śakuntalā resists at first, then gives up*) O, you with your intoxicating eyes, why don't you stop suspecting me of dishonourable behaviour. (*Śakuntalā glances up at him, then lowers her head*).

Raising her face lightly with two fingers, to himself.

My love's lower lip, soft and unbruised, 36
trembles with such alluring charm
as if granting me who thirst for it
the permission I eagerly wait for.

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d. Ārya-putra, the term a husband is addressed by. The king had already taken her hand - a gesture that signifies taking in marriage.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: My revered lord is taking his time to do what he promised, it seems.

DUHṢANTA: The lily adorning your ear, O beautiful one, was confusing me by its likeness to your eye to which it lies so close. (*blows the pollen dust away*)

ŚAKUNTALĀ: I can now see clearly. But I am sorry, my lord, I have no way of returning the kind favour you have done me.

DUHṢANTA: No matter, there is no need to, beautiful lady!

To inhale the fragrance of your face 37
is itself a favour bestowed on me.
Is the honeybee not well-content
with the mere fragrance of the lotus?

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*with a smile*): But if it were not, what would it do?

DUHṢANTA (*decisively brings his face close to hers*): This ....this.....

A VOICE OFFSTAGE: Little bride of the sheldrake, come bid your mate farewell; Night is here.[33]

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*flustered*): My Lord! Lady Gautamī is on her way here, to ask after my health, I'm sure. Hide behind this tangle of vines.

DUHṢANTA: Yes. (*goes into a secret place*)

Gautamī enters with a goblet in her hand.

GAUTAMĪ: My child! Here is the sanctified water for you. (*looks at her and helps her up*) A fine state of affairs.......unwell, and only the gods to keep you company.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Priyamvadā and Anasūyā went down just this minute to the Mālinī.

GAUTAMĪ (*sprinkling Śakuntalā with the holy water*): Dear child, may you live long and in good health. Is your fever somewhat abated now? (*touches her*)

ŚAKUNTALĀ: There is a change for the better, Mother.

GAUTAMĪ: The day is drawing to its close; come, child, let us return to our cottage.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*rising with difficulty, to herself*): O, my heart, at first you drew back like a coward, fearing to taste the happiness that came knocking at your door. Now to your great regret, the time of parting has come; and how bitter is your anguish. O fragrant bower of creepers! Soother of my anguish! I bid you farewell and take leave of you only to meet again and enjoy your company. (*leaves*)

DUḤṢANTA (*returning to his former seat and sighing deeply*): O misery! Many a hindrance lies between desire and its fulfillment:

She turned aside that lovely face 38
with beautifully-lashed eyes;
again and again she guarded with her fingers
her lower lip, all the more tempting
for the faltering words of denial
murmured indistinct:
after much gentle persuasion
I raised her face to mine—
but could not kiss it, alas!

Where, where shall I go now? No, I shall stay right here; here in the bower of creepers where my beloved rested. (*looks round*)

Here on the stone-slab is the bed of flowers 39
crushed by her body; here lies languishing
her message of love confided to the lotus-leaf;
an ornament of fine lotus-stalks, banished
from her hand lies there pathetic, abandoned;
my eyes cling to each object that I see;
how then can I leave this arbour of reeds
all on a sudden, deserted though it be.

(*reflecting*) Alas! It was surely a mistake on my part to have delayed and wasted time once I had won my beloved over. So now:

When next I find myself alone with her 40
—that girl with a face of chiseled loveliness—
I shall lose no time.
For, as a rule, happiness is hard to come by :
thus my heart frustrated by obstacles
spells it out.
But, in the presence of the beloved,
my heart stands somewhat abashed.

(*a voice in the air*) O king!

The evening rituals are in solemn progress; 41
flesh-eating demons prowl and press round the altars
where the Holy Fire blazes.
Like massed thunder-clouds reflecting the sunset glow,
their shadowy forms, lurid,
move around in many ways
fear-instilling.

DUḤṢANTA (*listens, then speaks resolutely*): Ho there! Ascetics, do not fear.....here I am ..... I am coming.

End of Act Three
Entitled
Love's Fruition

ACT FOUR

PRELUDE

SCENE: The Hermitage.

Enter Śakuntalā's friends gathering flowers.

ANASŪYĀ: Priyamvadā, although I rejoice greatly knowing that Śakuntalā is happily married to a husband of her own choice who is worthy of her in every respect, I feel rather uneasy about something.

PRIYAMVADĀ: And what may that be?

ANASŪYĀ: The Royal Sage has been given leave to depart by the sages grateful for the successful completion of the Sacrifice; and he has returned to his Capital. Now, in the company of his Queens, will he remember all that happened here in the Hermitage...or will he not?

PRIYAMVADĀ: O, surely you should not feel uneasy on that score; such a noble form cannot house a nature so totally at variance with it. But I am anxious about something else; how will Father Kaṇva take it when he hears of all this on his return?

ANASŪYĀ: If you ask me, this marriage will be sealed with father's approval and blessing.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Why do you think that?

ANASŪYĀ: It is the paramount consideration in the mind of a parent to give a young daughter in marriage to a groom endowed with all noble qualities. If the gods themselves send one without any effort on the part of the parent, would he not congratulate himself on being most fortunate?

PRIYAMVADĀ (*looks into the basket*): Anasūyā, don't you think we have picked enough flowers for the worship of the divinities of the home?

ANASŪYĀ: But we also need some flowers for the adoration of Śakuntalā's Goddess of Fortune who watches over her marriage.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Yes, you are right.

They gather more flowers.

A VOICE OFFSTAGE RINGS OUT: Ho there! I am here, at your door!

ANASŪYĀ (*listening carefully*): That sounds like a guest announcing himself.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Surely Śakuntalā is not far from the cottage; Ah....hm....but I'm afraid her heart is far away.

ANASŪYĀ: Then we must go; these flowers will do.

They are about to leave.

THE SAME VOICE OFFSTAGE RINGS OUT: Woe to you! Woe! You insolent girl who disregards the honoured guest standing at your door!

You who do not notice me, 1
a hoard of holy merit
standing at your door,
because you are lost in thoughts of one
to the exclusion of all else,
you shall be lost in his thoughts:
though you goad his memory hard,
he shall fail to remember you,
even as a man drunk remembers not
thereafter, the tale he told before.

Hearing this, the girls are dismayed.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Alas, alas the worst has happened. Our darling Śakuntalā, absent-minded, has offended some guest worthy of great reverence.

ANASŪYĀ (*looking ahead*): And it is not just any guest, O cruel Fate! It is the great sage Durvāsā quick to anger. Look where he is going after cursing her so cruelly....striding off briskly shaking with passion; it will not be easy to intercept him.

PRIYAMVADĀ: What has the power to burn other than Fire? You must go quickly, Anasūyā; fall at his feet and try to calm him down while I hurry and get water and a guest-offering to welcome him.

ANASŪYĀ: Yes, I am going. (*goes out in haste*)

PRIYAMVADĀ (*takes a few hurried steps, then stumbles*): O, an ill omen! This is what comes of hurrying. The basket has slipped from my hand and the flowers lie all scattered on the ground. I had better pick them up. (*starts picking up the flowers*)

ANASŪYĀ (*entering*): O my friend, anger incarnate that he is, do you think he is one to accept anyone's entreaties? But I managed to squeeze a little compassion out of the old crust.

PRIYAMVADĀ (*smiling*) : Even that 'little' is a lot for him; what happened, tell me.

ANASŪYĀ: When he peremptorily refused to turn back, I pleaded with him in these words: 'Most Venerable Holiness, your daughter is unaware of the great power you possess through your austerities; this is also her very first offence; considering these, please, revered Sir, forgive her.'

PRIYAMVADĀ: Then what did he say, go on.

ANASŪYĀ: He said: 'My curse cannot prove false; but its power will cease the moment she presents some ornament as a token of recognition.' With these words he vanished into thin air.

PRIYAMVADĀ: At least we can console ourselves a little with that. There is a token. When the Royal Sage was taking leave of Śakuntalā, he slipped the signet-ring with his name inscribed on it on her finger, as a remembrance. She does have in her possession the means of ensuring recognition.

They turn round and see Śakuntalā at the cottage door.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Look, Anasūyā, do you see our dearest friend there? Still, as if drawn in a picture, her cheek resting on her left hand...her mind so totally absorbed in thoughts of her absent lord that she does not seem to be aware of her own self...how could she have noticed the presence of a visitor.

ANASŪYĀ: I tell you what; let us keep this matter of the curse between our two selves. Delicate by nature, our dear friend should be spared a shock.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Naturally, who would sprinkle a tender jasmine with boiling water. (*both leave*)

END OF THE PRELUDE

Enter a pupil of Kaṇva, just got up from sleep.

PUPIL: I have been asked by His Holiness just returned from his pilgrimage, to look out and see what time it is. Let me go out into the open and ascertain how much of the night remains. (*Turns and looks around*) O, it is daybreak already, I see.

Here, the Moon, lord of healing herbs 2
sinks behind the western mountain,
there, on the eastern, Dawn heralds
the advance of the rising Sun.
The rise and setting of the two lights simultaneous
regulate the vicissitudes of life on earth.

And further,

Now that the Moon has set, the pool of moon-lotuses 3
delights not the eye—her beauty is but a memory.
The grief of women left alone when loved ones
travel far are beyond measure hard to bear.

See how:

Dawn's rose-red glow flushes the dew on the jujube trees; 4
the peacock awakened flies down from its roost
on the cottage roof of darbha-grass;
the blackbuck springs up from the altar's edge of sand
marked by his hooves, stretches his limbs
and draws himself up to his noble height.

And further:

This same Moon who dispelled Darkness 5
by stepping on the crown of Sumeru[a].
Parent of Mountains, and traversed
the middle regions of Viṣṇu's abode,
now falls down the sky in a pitiful glimmer of light:
the ascent too high of even the great ends in a fall.

Anasūyā enters with a toss of the curtain and soliloquizes.

ANASŪYĀ: Dawn is breaking. I am up early. But now that I am awake, what is there for me to do? My hands refuse to go about their normal morning duties. Let the god of love be now happy since he has brought my pure-hearted friend into contact with a perfidious man. On the other hand, the Royal Sage may not be to blame. Perhaps, Durvāsā's curse is working itself out. Otherwise, how is it possible that after all the protestations he made, the king has not sent word to her all this time? (*reflects a moment*) Then, shall we send him the Ring he left for remembrance? But with whom? Which of these austere hermits, serene and devoid of passions can we ask? And we can't get our friend into trouble by informing Father Kaṇva that Śakuntalā is

a. The mountain Meru

married to Duḥṣanta and now bears his child. In such a situation what can we do?

PRIYAMVADĀ: Anasūyā, Anasūyā, come quickly, hurry; the festive ceremonies for Śakuntalā's departure are on.

ANASŪYĀ: What? What is all this? (*astonished*)

PRIYAMVADĀ: Listen, just now I went to Śakuntalā's bedside to ask if she had slept well.

ANASŪYĀ: Then, then?

PRIYAMVADĀ: What do I see: Father Kaṇva, embracing Śakuntalā whose head was bowed low as if in shame, was felicitating her saying: "Fortunately, my child, even though the smoke was blinding the sacrificer's eyes, the oblation he made fell right into the Fire."[34] You are like knowledge imparted to a good pupil—not to be regretted. I shall arrange to send you to your husband this very day with an escort of ascetics.

ANASŪYĀ (*astonished*): But who informed Father Kaṇva of all that had happened during his absence?

PRIYAMVADĀ: As he was entering the Sanctuary of the Mystic Fire, a bodiless voice chanted a verse.

ANASŪYĀ: Repeat it to me.

PRIYAMVADĀ (*speaks in Sanskrit in the metre of the sacred texts*):

> As the holy tree 6
> is with Mystic Fire pregnant,
> so is your daughter;
> know, O Great Brāhmaṇa,
> she holds Duḥṣanta's glowing energy
> pledged for the wellbeing of the world.

ANASŪYĀ (*embracing Priyamvadā, ecstatically*): O, what great news; I am happy, happy beyond all measure; yet, my mind is poised between joy and regret; regret that dear Śakuntalā will be leaving this very day.

PRIYAMVADĀ: We shall get over our regrets soon enough; let the poor girl taste some happiness.

ANASŪYĀ: Of course. It is for such an occasion that I put away a garland of Kesara flowers whose fragrance is lasting; there it is, in that casket of palm leaves hanging over there from a branch of the mango tree. Will you take it down and wrap it in lotus leaves while I go and prepare all the auspicious materials for Śakuntalā's adornment: yellow

orpiment, holy earth, and Dūrvā sprouts? (*goes out*)

Priyamvadā takes down the casket of Kesara flowers.

A VOICE BACKSTAGE: "Gautamī, bid Śārṅgarava and the other hermits get ready to escort Śakuntalā."

PRIYAMVADĀ: Anasūyā, hurry, hurry. They are calling the hermits who are to escort Śakuntalā to the Capital.

Anasūyā enters with a tray of toiletries in her hand.

PRIYAMVADĀ (*looks ahead*): Anasūyā, there, do you see Śakuntalā, her hair freshly washed at sunrise with hallowed water? She is surrounded by the wives of sages who are congratulating her and invoking blessings holding in their hands grains of rice sanctified by prayers. Let us go and join them.

Śakuntalā is seen seated with Lady Gautamī and wives of sages, as described.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: I bow to all of you, revered ladies.

FIRST LADY: Daughter, may your lord confer on you the title of Chief Queen[35] as a mark of his high esteem.

SECOND LADY: Child, may you give birth safely to a son who will be a hero.

THIRD LADY: May you be honoured by your lord in every way.

Having blessed her they all leave except for Gautamī.

FRIENDS (*approaching her*): May the Holy Bath shower all happiness on you, dear Śakuntalā.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Welcome, welcome to my dearest friends; sit near me, won't you.

FRIENDS: Now sit still while we apply the auspicious adornments on your person.

The two friends sit down and pick up the tray containing the auspicious cosmetics.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: I value this affectionate service you do me today more than I did at any other time. When will I be adorned again by my dear friends? (*weeps*)

FRIENDS: Dearest friend, you should not weep on such a happy occasion as this. (*wipe away her tears and begin to apply the decorations on her face*)

PRIYAMVADĀ: These simple adornments are all we have in the Hermitage; they do no justice to your beauty that richly deserves fine jewels and adornments to set it off.

Enter two hermit boys bearing gifts for Śakuntalā.

BOYS: Here are rich ornaments to adorn the Lady Śakuntalā.

Everybody looks at them in astonishment.

GAUTAMĪ: Hārīta, my child, where did you get these?

HĀRĪTA: We found them, Lady, through Father Kaṇva's favour.

GAUTAMĪ: Created by his mind-power?

HĀRĪTA: No, not quite; he directed us saying: 'Go, bring lovely blossoms from the great forest trees for Śakuntalā's adornment'. So we went:

A certain tree produced as if by magic 7
a garment of silk, pale-bright as moonbeams,
fitting for this most auspicious occasion;
another noble tree poured out rich rose-red juice
to tint beautifully her tender feet;
in the branches of other stately trees
woodland nymphs unseen, held out their hands
rivalling in beauty delicate leaf buds unfurling
to offer rich gifts of rare jewels.

PRIYAMVADĀ (*looking at Śakuntalā*): The Queen-bee though born in a tree-hollow deserves nothing less than the honey of the lotus.

GAUTAMĪ: Dear child, the bestowal of such rare gifts augurs well for the great honours that await you in the palace of your lord.

Śakuntalā bashful, looks down.

HĀRĪTA: I shall now go and acquaint Father Kaṇva who went down to the Mālinī, with news of the homage rendered by the Lords of the Forest.

ANASŪYĀ: Friend, not being used to handling such fine ornaments how can we adorn you? (*reflecting*) Drawing on our knowledge of painting and having seen paintings, we shall adorn you with these jewels.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*with a sweet smile*): O, I know how clever you both are.

The two friends get busy adorning Śakuntalā with the ornaments. Enter Sage Kaṇva having finished his ablutions.

KAṆVA:

"Śakuntalā leaves us today"—sobs my heart 8
grief-stricken; unshed tears choke my voiceless throat;
a pale cast of troubled thoughts dims my very sight.
If affection can make me, a hermit grown old
in the forest's hard school, so distraught,
O, how much more bitter must the anguish be
of the first parting from a daughter,

to fathers who dwell in the heart of home and family.

FRIENDS: Śakuntalā dear, you are now properly adorned; put on this pair of silk garments[36] that have been blessed by prayer.

Śakuntalā rises and puts them on.

GAUTAMĪ: Look, dear child; your father is standing there watching you as if he were embracing you with eyes that are brimming with happy tears. Greet him with due reverence.

Śakuntalā shyly makes reverential obeisance to her father.

KAṆVA: My beloved child:

Be held in high esteem by your lord 9
as Śarmiṣṭhā was by Yayāti;
as she bore Puru, may you too bear
a son to whom the whole world will bow.

GAUTAMĪ: Worshipful Sir, this is a boon, not a blessing.

KAṆVA: Daughter, come, go round these sacred fires into which oblations have just been offered.

Śakuntalā walks sun-wise[b] *round the fires.*

KAṆVA (*chants a blessing using a vedic metre*):

May these Fires of the Sacrifice 10
ranged round the holy altar
that blaze fed with sacred wood
within the Circle
of strewn darbha grass
whose smoke fragrant
with the oblations
billows out
chasing away all evil
keep you always good and pure.

KAṆVA: My darling, now start on your journey. (*glancing around*). Where are Śārṅgarava and his companions?

They enter with "Holy Sir, here we are".

KAṆVA: Śārṅgarava, show your sister the way.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: This way, come this way, gracious lady.

All walk around.

KAṆVA: Hear, O hear, all you noble trees of the Holy Grove with indwelling divinities:

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b. Clockwise

She who never had a drink of water 11
before you had all drunk your fill;
she who never plucked your tender buds
for love of you though fond of adorning herself;
she to whom it was a joyous festival
when you first burst into bloom, she, Śakuntalā,
leaves us today for her husband's home:
all grant her leave to go.

A koel sings.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA:

Kin to her during her woodland sojourn 12
the trees now give her leave to go,
answering your request, Sir, in the koel's notes.
Śakuntalā can now bid the grove farewell.

Voices in the sky; invisible spirits sing [37]

May her path be safe and gracious, 13
as gentle breezes blow;
pleasant be her way dotted by lakes
where green lotus-creepers grow;
may the burning rays of the sun
filter mellowed through thick shade-trees;
let the pollen of water-lilies drift
to lie as softest dust beneath her feet.

All listen in great amazement.

GAUTAMĪ: Dear child, do you hear the goddesses of the Holy Grove bidding you farewell in as loving a manner as your own kinsfolk? Bow to them with proper reverence.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*walks around bowing, then speaks aside*): Oh! Priyamvadā, even though I am yearning to see my lord once more, now that I am deserting the Hermitage, my feet move forward with painful reluctance.

PRIYAMVADĀ: The bitterness of parting is not yours alone; look around; see how the Holy Groves grieve, knowing the hour of parting from you is near:

The doe tosses out mouthfuls of grass, 14
the peacocks dance no more;
pale leaves are fluttering down
as if the vines are shedding their limbs.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*recollecting*): O Father, I have to say goodbye to Mādhavī, my woodland sister.

KAṆVA: Yes, my child, I know how much you love her; here she is, to your right.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*comes close to the jasmine and throws her arms round it*): O, Vanajyotsnā, beloved sister, twine your branching arms round me; from today, I shall be far, far away from you. Dear Father, do care for her as if she were me.

KAṆVA: My love,

What I had contemplated from the first for you, 15
a worthy husband, by your own merits you have obtained.
Freed from needful care for you, I shall now make
the mango by her side, the loving bridegroom of this vine.

So come this way and start on your journey.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*coming close to her friends*): I leave her in your hands, dearest friends.

FRIENDS: And in whose care are you leaving us? (*they burst into tears*)

KAṆVA: O for shame, Anasūyā, Priyamvadā, dry your tears. It is at a time like this that Śakuntalā needs your support to be firm.

All walk around.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Father, you see that young doe keeping close to the cottage and moving slowly because she is near her time—when she fawns safely, will you send someone to give me the happy news? You will not forget, dear Father?

KAṆVA: I shall not forget it, my child.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*feeling something holding her back*) : Hello! Who's this at my heels, tugging again and again at the edge of my garment? (*turns to look*)

KAṆVA: My darling,

It is the little fawn, your adopted son, 16
whom you fondly reared with handfuls of millet;
whose mouth you dabbed with healing Iṅgudi oil
when lacerated by sharp blades of Kuśa-grass;
it is he who will not move out of your path.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*addresses the fawn*): My fondling, why do you follow me who abandons all those she lived among. No sooner were you born than your mother died and I brought you up; now abandoned by me, it is

Father who has to take care of you. So go back, my little pet, go back. (*weeping, she moves on*)

KAṆVA: O, my child, do not weep so; keep your courage up and see where you are going.

Brace your will and check this flow of welling tears, 17
that veil the light of those eyes with lashes curving up;
your steps falter on the uneven ground
where your path winds, its ups and downs unheeded.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: Your Holiness! You must remember that a loved one is to be accompanied only up to the water's edge. And this, is the edge of the lake; so give us your instructions and turn back at this point.

KAṆVA: Then let us withdraw into the shade of this milk-bearing tree. (*they retire into the shade of the fig-tree*) Now, what would be an appropriate message to send His Honour Duḥṣanta? (*reflects deeply for a while*)

ANASŪYĀ: Dear Śakuntalā, have you noticed, there is not one sentient being in the Hermitage that is not sorrowful now at the prospect of losing you. See:

The cakravāka answers not the call of his love 18
hidden behind lotus-leaves;
with lotus-fibre dangling from his beak,
he gazes only at you.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Ah! Anasūyā, the cakravākī not seeing her beloved companion, who is just a few lotus-leaves away from her really shrills in distress.......(*with fear*)[c] truly, what a hard lot to bear....

PRIYAMVADĀ:

She too spends the night away from her beloved, 19
the night grown long from sorrow;
the heart is heavy with the pain of parting,
but hope's slender thread still supports it.

KAṆVA: Śārṅgarava, my son; present Śakuntalā to the good king addressing him with these words of mine.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: Command me, Your Holiness.

KAṆVA:

Consider us, who are rich in self-restraint, 20
and consider your own exalted lineage;

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c. A premonition

consider well her love, spontaneous,
that flowed towards you unprompted by her kin;
regard her then as worth equal esteem
with your other consorts; more than that rests
on what Fortune has in hand for her;
the bride's kin ought not to speak of it.[38]

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: I have grasped the message, Your Holiness.

KAṆVA (*addressing Śakuntalā*): My child, I should now give you some advice. Though I am a forest-dweller, I am conversant with worldly matters.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: Holiness, no matter is beyond the reach of the wise.

KAṆVA: My child, when you leave here and reach your husband's home;

Serve your elders with diligence, be a 21
friend to your co-wives;
even if wronged by your husband, do not cross
him through anger;
treat those who serve you with utmost courtesy;
do not be puffed up with pride of wealth and pleasures;
thus do girls gain the status of mistress of the home;
those who act contrary are the bane of their families.

What does our Gautamī think of this?

GAUTAMĪ: The best advice for a young bride. (*to Śakuntalā*) Dear daughter, do not forget these words.

KAṆVA: My beloved child, come, embrace me and your two friends.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: O Father, will my dear friends have to turn back right here?

KAṆVA : My darling, they also have to be given in marriage. It would not be proper for them to go with you. Gautamī will accompany you.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*clasping her father in her arms*): Rent from my dear father's lap like a sapling of the sandalwood tree uprooted from the side of the Malaya mountain, how can I ever survive in an alien soil? (*weeps bitterly*)

KAṆVA: O my darling, why are you so distressed?

Occupying the honoured place of consort 22
to your nobly-descended lord, you will
each moment be engrossed in great affairs
consequent to his imperial estate.
And like the East the bright and holy sun,
soon you will give birth to a royal son;
the grief of parting from me will then
count but little with you, my darling.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*falling at her father's feet*): Father, I bow to you in reverence.

KAṆVA: My child, may all that I wish for you come true.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*coming close to her friends*): My dear, dear friends, hold me close, both of you together.

FRIENDS (*embracing her*): Śakuntalā dear, listen, if the good king be at all slow to recognize you, be sure to show him the Ring inscribed with his name.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: You are voicing misgivings that make my heart tremble.

FRIENDS: No, no, do not be afraid. Affection always makes a friend over-anxious.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA (*looking up*): The sun has mounted over the tree-tops, Your Holiness; the lady had better hurry.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*again throwing her arms round her father*): Dear Father, when shall I see this holy Hermitage again?

KAṆVA:

> When you have shared for many long years 23
> with this rich Earth bounded by the four oceans,
> exalted majesty as Duḥṣanta's Queen;
> when the heroic son you bear, a warrior
> unrivalled, shall shoulder sovereignty's yoke,
> then you shall return, and with your lord
> enter this Hermitage again,
> seeking its blessing of tranquillity.[39]

GAUTAMĪ: Dear child, the favourable time for starting your journey is fast going by. Do not hold your Father back; let him return. (*turning to Kaṇva*) It is better that Your Holiness leave first, leading the others back to the Hermitage.

KAṆVA: My darling, the performance of my holy rites is being interrupted.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Dear Father, the affairs of the Hermitage will prevent you from missing me. But I am already beginning to miss you, Father.

KAṆVA: O, child, my beloved child, how could you think that I would be so uncaring. (*sighing deeply*)

> How can my grief ever leave me, 24
> O, my beloved child,
> when I see at the cottage door
> green shoots sprouting
> where you scattered wild rice
> making offerings to the divinities!

Go, my child; may your path be blessed.

Śakuntalā leaves with Gautamī, Śārṅgarava and Śāradvata.

FRIENDS (*following Śakuntalā with their eyes for a long time, speak with sorrow*): Alas, alas, Śakuntalā is now hidden from our view by a line of trees.

KAṆVA: Anasūyā, Priyamvadā, your friend and companion is gone. Check your grief and follow me.

FRIENDS: O, Father, we shall be entering the Holy Groves that will be desolate,[d] bereft of Śakuntalā's presence.

KAṆVA: It is your great affection for her that makes you feel this way. (*walks around meditatively*) Ah, now that I have seen Śakuntalā leave for her husband's home, I have regained calm of mind. Think of it:

A daughter is wealth that belongs to another; 25
today I have sent her to him who took her hand;
at once, my inner being is clear and calm
as if I have restored a pledge left with me in trust.

All exit

End of Act Four
Entitled
Śakuntalā's Departure

ACT FIVE

PRELUDE

Enter the Royal Chamberlain, Pārvatāyana.

PĀRVATĀYANA (*sighing*): Alas, how the years have taken their toll of me.

This ceremonial staff of cane I took 1
when chosen to head the Royal Household
has with the passage of time become
the support of my faltering steps.

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d. Variant: The Holy Groves that will be like an empty desert without Śakuntalā's presence.

I shall see his Majesty in the Inner Apartments to inform him of some business that he has to attend to himself immediately. (*going a little way*) Yes, but what was it? (*pondering*) Ah! I have it. Some ascetics, pupils of Kaṇva wish to see him. O, how strange!

Wakeful one moment, 2
shrouded in darkness the next,
my ageing mind
is like the flame of a dying lamp.

(*turns round and sees the king*) : Here is His Majesty:

Wearied caring for his subjects 3
as if they were his own children,
he now seeks the peace of seclusion
as a lord of elephants who led his herd
to graze all day burned by the noonday sun,
finds at last a quiet, cool spot to rest.

To tell the truth I hesitate to tell His Majesty who has just risen from the seat of judgement that Kaṇva's pupils are here. But then, where do the protectors of the earth find time to rest. That's how it is;

The Sun yoked his coursers just that once; 4
the fragrant wind blows night and day;
the Cosmic Serpent[40] ever bears Earth's burden;
and this is the Law that binds him who claims a sixth.

Turning around sees the king enter with the vidūṣaka followed by his retinue in order of rank.

DUḤṢANTA (*wearied by the burden of governance*): Every man who gains the object of his desire is happy. Only to kings does the gain itself bring misery. For,

Attainment of sovereignty merely lays to rest 5
the eager craving of expectancy;
what is gained lays on one a weight of care.
Guarding kingship, like an umbrella[41] held in
one's own hand
tires more than it removes tiredness.

VOICES OF TWO BARDS OFF-STAGE: Victory to our lord.

FIRST BARD:

Unmindful of your own ease, you toil 6
each day for the world's sake—such is your way of life;
the tree bares its crown to the blazing heat
while it refreshes those who shelter in its shade.

SECOND BARD:

Grasping the rod of justice, 7
you bring to heel those set on evil paths;
you bring calm where contention rages,
affording your subjects protection.
Kinsmen come flocking where wealth abounds.
But in you, O king, all find kinship's perfect pattern.

DUḤṢANTA (*listening*): This is great; hearing these words have revived my spirits worn out by the task of governing the kingdom.

MĀḌHAVYA: Tell the bull he is king of the herd and his tiredness disappears.

DUḤṢANTA (*with a smile*): Well, let's sit down.

They both sit down while the retinue stands in order of rank; the sound of a lute is heard in the background.

MĀḌHAVYA (*listening intently*): Listen carefully to the sounds coming from the Hall of Music, my friend. Do you near the pure, clear tones of a lovely melody played on the vina, keeping perfect rhythm? I think it is Lady Hamsavatī practising her singing.

DUḤṢANTA (*listening*): Now be quiet, Māḍhavya, and let me listen.

PĀRVATĀYANA (*watching the king*): Oho! His Majesty seems lost in deep thought. I had better wait for the right moment to approach him. (*He stands on one side*)

A VOICE OFF-STAGE, SINGING:

O you honey-pilfering bee! 8
Greedy as ever for fresh honey;
once you lovingly kissed
the mango's fresh spray of flowers[42].
Is she then forgotten so soon?
You are content now merely to stay
within the full-blown lotus.

DUḤṢANTA: O, how brimful of passion comes this song borne on the air.

MĀḌHAVYA: So....you have understood every word of the song?

DUḤṢANTA (*smiling*): Yes; once I loved her deeply. She is taunting me now for my neglect of her. Māḍhavya, my friend, do go to Queen Hamsavatī and tell her that I have taken to heart the reproof that she has conveyed so subtly.[a]

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a. Variant: And now she taunts me that I am constantly at the side of the Queen Consort.

MĀḌHAVYA: As Your Honour commands (*gets up*). Look here, my friend, you are getting someone else to catch a bear by its tail for you. Like a shaven monk still in the grip of passion, I have no hope of release.

DUḤṢANTA: Come, come, my friend, speak to her like the cultivated man-about-town that you are.

MĀḌHAVYA: I see; there seems to be no way out for me. (*he exits*)

DUḤṢANTA (*to himself*): That song I just heard....a restless, yearning sadness steals into my heart....though I am not separated from someone I love deeply. Or....can it be that:

When a sadness ineffable falls 9
suddenly like a shadow over the heart
—even while one is wrapped in happiness—
the mind trills spontaneous, unknown to itself,
to an intimation from the past
quickened by some fleeting loveliness
or haunting sounds of exquisite music heard:
lasting impressions of love's remembrance
live on in us from former lives, perhaps,
clinging like fragrance to our migrant soul.

He remains bewildered as if trying to recollect something.

PĀRVATĀYANA (*approaching the king*): Victory, victory to His Majesty. Sire, some hermits who dwell in the forests at the foothills of the Himalayas are here with a message from Kaṇva; they are accompanied by women. Your orders, Sire.

DUḤṢANTA (*surprised*): What! Hermits with a message from Kaṇva and accompanied by women, did you say?

PĀRVATĀYANA: Yes, Sire.

DUḤṢANTA: Send word to our preceptor, Somarāta, requesting him to welcome the ascetics from the Hermitage with all due vedic rites and then accompany them to our presence. I shall await their coming in a place suitable for receiving holy guests.

PĀRVATĀYANA: Your commands, Sire. (*he leaves*)

DUḤṢANTA (*rising*): Vetravatī, lead the way to the Sanctuary of the Mystic Fire.

VETRAVATĪ: This way, Your Majesty. (*turns around*) Gracious Sire, here is the terrace of the Fire Sanctuary, newly washed, and the cow that gives milk for the holy rites stands close by. Let his Majesty ascend the steps.

DUḤṢANTA (*mimes ascent and stands leaning on an attendant*): Vetravatī, I wonder why sage Kaṇva has sent these sages to our presence.

Has the penance of sages of strict vows, 10
possessed of spiritual energy immense
been defiled perchance by impediments?
Or has someone practised evil on creatures
roaming free in the Groves of Righteousness?
Or—has some misdeed of my own[43], alas!
Stopped the flowering of plants? My mind's bewildered
in the face of so many possible assumptions.

VETRAVATĪ: How could this be, in a Hermitage free from trouble, defended by your arm? It is my guess that the sages highly pleased with Your Majesty's noble conduct have come to honour you.

Enter Kaṇva's pupils accompanied by Gautamī, bringing Śakuntalā; the chamberlain and the preceptor are in front leading the way.

PĀRVATĀYANA: This way, this way, honoured ones.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: Śāradvata, my friend:

Granted, this king of unblemished nobleness 11
does not swerve from the path of rectitude;
true, none of his subjects, even those
in the lowliest walks of life, resort to evil ways;
even so, my mind enjoying continual solitude,
prompts me to view this place thronged with people
as a house encircled by blazing fires.

ŚĀRADVATA: You have become deeply disturbed from the moment we entered the city. It is understandable, for I feel the same way :

As a man freshly bathed views one seated massaged
with oil; 12
as one pure the impure, as one wakeful the sleeper;
as one who can move freely sees one in bondage;
thus I, freed of the world's will, regard these, bound to
the world.

SOMARĀTA: Therefore persons like you are great.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*feeling a bad omen*): O you gods! What means this throbbing of my right eye?

GAUTAMĪ: May all evil be averted; and may happiness always attend you.

They walk around.

SOMARĀTA (*pointing in the king's direction*): O, holy sages! There is His

Honour, the protector of the Four Estates; risen already from his seat he waits for you. Behold him.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: Most commendable, I grant you, O great Brāhmaṇa; even so, we view it all with an equal eye:

Trees bend down when laden with fruit; 13
rain clouds filled with water
hang low almost to the ground;
wealth does not make the good haughty:
this is the true nature
of those who do good to others.

VETRAVATĪ: From the serene expression on their faces, it is evident that the sages have come on a mission of goodwill.

DUḤṢANTA (*looking at Śakuntalā*): That lady?

Who may she be, standing veiled, I wonder; 14
the loveliness of her form, like a bud
not burst into bloom, is barely-revealed;
she appears in the midst of ascetics,
like a tender sprout among yellowing leaves.

VETRAVATĪ: Surely she does appear to be very beautiful, worth looking at, Sire.

DUḤṢANTA: Enough, it is highly improper to stare at another's wife.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*laying a hand on her bosom, speaks to herself*): Why are you trembling, O heart? Remembering the love my lord has for me, calm yourself.

SOMARĀTA (*coming forward*): Good Fortune attend you, Sire, the sages have been honoured with all due rites. They have a message for you from their preceptor. Will Your Majesty be pleased to hear it?

DUḤṢANTA: I am all attention.

SAGES (*approaching the king, they raise their hands in blessing*): May the king be ever victorious!

DUḤṢANTA (*with folded hands*): I greet you all.

SAGES: Good Fortune attend you.[44]

DUḤṢANTA: Do the penances prosper?

SAGES:

While you protect the virtuous 15
who dares disrupt their pious rites?
When the bright sun blazes bright
can darkness show its face?

DUḤṢANTA (*to himself*): By this praise, my title of ruler gains its true meaning. (*Aloud*) Is Sage Kaṇva in good health?

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: The wellbeing of those who have attained superhuman powers lies in their own control. He makes kind enquiries of Your Honour's good health and then addresses you thus:

DUḤṢANTA: What are the commands of His Holiness?

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: You took her, my daughter, in secret, as your wife; pleased, I have assented to the marriage.

We regard you as foremost among those of high worth 16
and Śakuntalā is Virtue's embodiment;
having brought together a bride and groom of equal merit,
the Creator after a long time incurs no reproach.
She bears your child; so take her as your lawful
wife and partner in all religious duties.

GAUTAMĪ: Gracious Sir, I wish to say a few words at this point, though it is not my place to speak.

DUḤṢANTA: Speak freely, Lady.

GAUTAMĪ:

You did not approach the elders in the matter, 17
she did not seek advice from her kinsfolk;
when it was all agreed upon between you two,
what in the world can one say to either?

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*to herself*): What will my Lord say now?

DUḤṢANTA (*listens to all this with his mind troubled by doubts*): What kind of proposition is this that is being placed before me?

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*to herself*): Ha! His words are fire in my ears.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: What means this? This talk of a proposition being placed before you? Your Honour is doubtless quite conversant with the ways of the world.

The world suspects even the most virtuous woman 18
as otherwise, when with her husband living,
the parental home becomes her sole resort:
hence, her kinsfolk wish that she be beside him
who took her by the hand as his wife,
be she dear to him, or be she not.

DUḤṢANTA: Are you saying that this lady is already married to me?

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*despondent, to herself*): O, my heart, your fears are proving true.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA:

Is this revulsion from a deed done? 19a
Or disregard for one's own actions?
Or turning away from one's duty?

DUḤṢANTA: This is a case of proceeding on a wrong assumption.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA:

Such fickleness generally swells and comes 19b
to a head in those drunk with power.

DUḤṢANTA: I am being taken to task too harshly.

GAUTAMĪ: Daughter, lay aside your bashfulness for a while; let me remove your veil. Your Lord will not fail to recognize you then.

DUḤṢANTA (*gazing ardently at Śakuntalā, speaks to himself with astonished admiration*) :

This glowing loveliness that is proffered unsought......... 20
was this held by me once as my own, or not?
my mind hovers uncertain, like a bee
circling at daybreak over the jasmine's dew-filled cup.
I cannot permit myself to possess it;
nor can I bring myself to relinquish it.

VETRAVATĪ (*to herself*): O, admirable is His Majesty's regard for right action. Who else would stop to consider right from wrong, when such beauty comes sweetly on its own and offers itself?

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: O king, what means this silence?

DUḤṢANTA: O, hermits, rich in holiness, try as I might, I cannot recall to my mind accepting the hand of this lady in marriage at any time. Seeing that she is plainly pregnant, how can I receive her when I have doubts about being the husband?

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*aside*): Alas, my cruel fate! Even the marriage is now in doubt; where are all those high-mounting hopes of mine?

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: Then don't;

Assenting gladly to your seizure of his daughter, 21
the good sage makes you worthy of such a gift,
as a robber is, offered the goods he seized:
for this he deserves your refusal—does he not?

ŚĀRADVATA: That is enough Śārṅgarava; cease expostulating. Śakuntalā, we have said what we had to say; the king has spoken as he has. Now, it is for you to give a fitting reply.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*to herself*): What can I say? When such a love has suffered such a change, what use is it reminding him of it now? On the other hand, I should defend myself and clear my name. (*aloud*) My revered Lord, (*stops in the middle*) no...my right to address you as such has been questioned. Prince of the Purus! In the Hermitage you deceived me, a simple girl, trusting and open by nature; then you made a solemn compact...now...to disown me with such words....is this becoming of you?

DUḤṢANTA (*stopping his ears*): Perish the sinful thought.

Why are you out to sully your family's honour, 22
and to make me fall; you are like a river
that crumbles its banks to muddy its crystal stream
and uproot the tree growing by its edge.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: If you are proceeding in this manner under the impression that I am another man's wife, I can remove your suspicions by showing this highly-prized token.

DUḤṢANTA: A proper procedure.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*feeling for the ring*): Ha! I am lost. The ring is missing from my finger.

Looks at Gautamī, shattered.

GAUTAMĪ: The ring must have slipped off and fallen into the water when you immersed yourself in holy Śacī's[17] Pool next to Indra's Landing.

DUḤṢANTA (*smiles ironically*): A good example of the ready wit that is womankind's gift.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Alas, Fate shows its inexorable power. But I shall relate something, an incident.

DUḤṢANTA: Ah, now we have something that is to be heard.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: You do remember that day in the bower of canes covered by vines—you held a cup of lotus leaves filled with water?

DUḤṢANTA: I am listening.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Just at that moment, the little fawn, my adopted son, whom I had named 'Liquid Long-eyes' came trotting up. Feeling affectionate towards him, you held the cup out saying, 'let him drink first' and coaxed him to drink. But he would not come near, because you were a stranger to him. When I took the cup from you and held it in my hand, he was happy to drink. And you laughed saying 'One trusts one's own kind, you are both creatures of the woods.'

DUḤṢANTA (*laughs sarcastically*): By such honeyed words are pleasure-loving men lured by young women out to gain their own ends.

GAUTAMĪ : Gracious Prince, you should not speak to her like that. Brought up in a sacred grove, this girl is a stranger to guile.

DUḤṢANTA: Ascetic matron, listen:

> Intuitive cunning is seen even in females 23
> of lower creatures: what then of those
> endowed with reason and understanding;
> the cuckoo, as we know, has her young reared
> by other birds before they take to the air.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*in anger*): Ignoble man! You who are like a well covered with grass....you judge every one by the measure of your own heart....who would stoop to imitate your conduct....practising falseness while putting on the mantle of virtue?

DUḤṢANTA (*to himself*): The lady's anger is real—the spontaneous outburst of one who lives in the green world.

> Her eyes red with anger look straight at me, 24
> her words flung out harsh, not smoothed into a drawl;
> her lower lip like a ripe bimba-fruit
> is all quivering as if struck by an icy blast;
> her eyebrows, graceful curves,
> knot together in a twisting frown.

Further, her anger fell concentrated on me whose mind is clouded over with uncertainties. Therefore,

> When I cruelly denied our secret love 25
> then did she dart flaming glances on me,
> fiercely bending the graceful curve of her brow,
> it seemed she snapped the bow of Love itself.

(*aloud*) Gracious lady, Duḥṣanta's life lies an open book before his subjects; it's there for you to read too.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: O, so,

> You are the sole measure, and you, only you know 26
> the firm Rule of Righteousness for the world;
> women, who have set aside their modesty,
> they understand nothing—they know nothing, is it?

Very well; so be it; putting my trust in the fame of Puru's lineage, I am fallen into the clutches of a man whose mouth is honey, but his heart stone... and now, I am made out to be a self-willed wanton. (*she covers her face with the end of her veil and weeps*)

ŚĀRṄGARAVA:

Thus does unbridled impulse destroy a person. 27
Therefore, a marriage, specially one made in secret
should be contracted after careful scrutiny;
affection quickly turns to hate in hearts
that have known each other but slenderly.

DUHṢANTA: O, Sir, You are hurling words of concentrated anger upon me, relying only on the testimony of this lady here.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA (*disdainfully*): O, no, that would be quite preposterous, would it not?

The words of one who from birth has grown up 28
uninstructed in deceit, should carry no weight;
but those who study deception as an esteemed art,[45]
are to be trusted as infallible speakers of truth.

DUHṢANTA: O, speaker of truth, supposing we are what you say we are, what is gained, do you think, by deceiving her?

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: Downfall.

DUHṢANTA: This is incredible; would the Pauravas court their own downfall?

ŚĀRADVATA: O King, why this bandying of words? We have carried out our Preceptor's orders; we shall leave presently.

This then, is your wife, accept her, or abandon her; 29
a husband's dominion over his wife is absolute.

Gautamī, lead the way.

The sages prepare to leave.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*calling out piteously*): What's this; here I am, betrayed by this cheat; are you also abandoning me?

Tries to follow Gautamī.

GAUTAMĪ (*stopping*): Son, Śārṅgarava, here is Śakuntalā following us, wailing pitifully. Cruelly repudiated by her husband, what can the poor child do?

ŚĀRṄGARAVA (*turning back*): You forward girl, are you asserting your independence?

Śakuntalā stops, frightened, trembling.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA:

If you are what the king says you are, 30
what will your father have to do with you —

a stain on his family? But, as you know
your own conduct to be pure, even servitude
in your husband's house will be welcome to you.

Stay here; we are leaving.

DUḤṢANTA: O ascetic! Why do you give this lady false hopes?

The Moon wakes only night-blooming lilies, 31
the sun only day-lotuses;
the man with mastery over his passions
turns away from the touch of another's wife.

ŚĀRṄGARAVA: Assuming that Your Honour has forgotten past events through impressions created by fresh interests, why this fear on your part of losing your virtue?

DUḤṢANTA: Very well, I shall ask you this; you tell me, which is the greater and which the lesser evil of the two?

Am I deluded, or, is she false? 32
This is the question;
should I incur the blame
of forsaking my own wife,
or the stain of adultery, alas!
With the wife of another?

SOMARĀTA (*after some thought*): Supposing we do it this way.

DUḤṢANTA: Instruct me, Your Reverence.

SOMARĀTA: Let the gracious lady who is with child stay in my house till she gives birth. I shall tell you why I suggest this; the seers have already foretold that your first-born is destined to be a Universal Monarch.[b] If the sage's daughter should give birth to a son bearing all the marks of sovereignty on his person, then, offering her your felicitations, receive her into your Royal Apartments; if it turns out otherwise then the only thing to do is to take her back to her father.

DUḤṢANTA: As my revered Preceptor deems right.

SOMARĀTA: Child, follow me.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*weeping*): O Gracious Goddess, Mother Earth, open wide and take me in.

The sages leave with Gautamī. Śakuntalā follows the High Priest. The king remains musing over Śakuntalā but his memory is still clouded.

A VOICE OFF-STAGE: O, a marvel! A marvel has occurred.

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b. The sovereign of the World

DUHṢANTA: What could it be?

The High Priest enters dazed with amazement.

SOMARĀTA: My Lord, something quite marvellous has just occurred.

DUHṢANTA: What is it?

SOMARĀTA: No sooner had Kaṇva's disciples left on their journey back than:—

> The young girl cursing her stars, 33
> wept aloud, flinging her hands up;

DUHṢANTA: And then?

SOMARĀTA: A flash of light in woman's shape from Apsarā Tīrtha[c] far away lifted her up...................... and vanished.

DUHṢANTA: Reverence, we have already settled this matter and dismissed it; what is the point of pursuing it further? Your Honour may go and rest.

SOMARĀTA: Be victorious. (*exits*).

DUHṢANTA: Vetravatī, I am deeply disturbed; lead the way to my bedchamber.

VETRAVATĪ: This way, this way, my Lord.

DUHṢANTA (*to himself*):

> I have spurned the sage's daughter, it is true, 34
> having no recollection of marrying her;
> yet, the poignant ache in my heart validates
> it seems, the truth of her assertion that I had.

All exit

End of Act Five
Entitled
The Repudiation of Śakuntalā

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c. The sacred pool of apsarās

ACT SIX

PRELUDE

SCENE: Duḥṣanta's Capital.

Enter the Chief of the City Police with two policemen behind him, leading a man with his hands tied at the back.

POLICEMEN (*beating the prisoner*): Hey, you thief! Tell us how you came by this Royal Signet Ring set with a priceless gem and the King's name engraved round it in the setting. Come on, tell us.

MAN (*in great fear*): O, please worthy Sirs, please; I am no thief, indeed I am not.

FIRST POLICEMAN: O, is that so? Did the king then give this ring to you as a gift? Because he regarded you highly as some distinguished brahmin?

MAN: Please Sir, listen to me; I am but a poor fisherman living at Śakrāvatāra.

SECOND POLICEMAN: You foul thief! Did we ask where you lived or what you lived by?

CHIEF: Sūcaka, let him tell his story in his own way, from the beginning, in order; and don't interrupt him, either of you.

POLICEMAN: As Your Honour commands, Sir. Speak, vermin, speak.

FISHERMAN: Well, worthy Sirs, I support my family by catching fish with hooks and nets and other such devices, Sirs.

CHIEF (*laughing*): A most clean and virtuous livelihood, I'm sure.

FISHERMAN: O Master, do not laugh at my trade,

> For it's said, a fellow shouldn't give up 1
> the trade he's born to, however low it may be;
> the most soft-hearted of butchers engages
> in the cruel job of slaughtering animals.

CHIEF: Yes, yes, go on.

FISHERMAN: One day as I am cutting up this big carp into pieces, what do I see lying in its belly—O Sirs, I see this Ring, its huge gem flashing. Then, Sirs, as I am hawking it around here, hoping, of course, for a good sale—I am then seized by these worthy masters. That's all I've to tell you as to how I got this Ring. Either you kill me, or, you set me free.

CHIEF (*sniffing the Ring*): O yes, it's been in a fish's belly all right; such a stink of raw fish pours out of it. But—how it got into that damn fish in the first place—that has to be carefully investigated. So come; to the palace we must go now.

POLICEMAN: Yes, Your Honour. Go in, Your Honour, where royal favour awaits you.

The Chief goes out.

SŪCAKA (*after a while*): His Honour has been away quite a while, it seems, Jānuka.

JĀNUKA: O you know how one has to wait and approach a king at just the right moment.

SŪCAKA: I tell you, my friend, my hands, they just itch to finish off this cut-purse.

FISHERMAN: O Sir, you wouldn't want to kill someone without good reason, would you now?

JĀNUKA (*looking*): There is our chief coming towards us with a letter in his hand; that must be the Royal Decree. (*to the fisherman*) Hey you, fellow, you will either make your acquaintance soon with the fangs of bloodhounds or become an offering to vultures.

CHIEF (*entering*): Quickly, make haste, this....

FISHERMAN (*cuts in, terrified, before the sentence is completed*): O misery, misery, I am done for.....

CHIEF: Hey you, release him, fellows, release the fisherman, I say. It is now quite clear how the Ring came into his hands.

SŪCAKA: As you command, your Honour (*unties the bonds*)

JĀNUKA: You might say that this man entered Death's kingdom and returned, mightn't you?

FISHERMAN: O, Master, I owe my life to you. (*falls at his feet.*)

CHIEF: Get up, you, and here, take this; His Majesty has graciously ordered that this reward, equal in value to the Ring, be given to you (*gives him money*)

FISHERMAN (*accepting it with a deep bow*): Your Honour, I am most highly favoured.

SŪCAKA: Indeed, you might well describe it as a favour. For here is a man who has been taken off the point of an impaling stake and set on the back of an elephant.

JĀNUKA: Your Honour, the princely reward indicates that His Majesty must set great store by this Ring with its priceless gem.

CHIEF: Hm.........no, I don't think it was the rare gem that mattered so much to His Majesty.

BOTH: Then what?

CHIEF: Somehow, I got the impression that the Ring made His Majesty remember someone he had loved very much.....because, as soon as he saw it—for a moment he was much moved—and by nature, His Majesty is very poised and dignified.

SŪCAKA: A great service has then been done to His Majesty by Your Honour.

JĀNUKA: To this enemy of little fishes here, I'd say. (*glares resentfully at the fisherman*)

FISHERMAN (*taking the hint*): Worshipful Master, let half of this be yours—drink-money, Sirs.

JĀNUKA : Fisherman, as of this very instant, you have become my very best friend. The beginning of such a friendship should be pledged with some good flower-wine. Come, let us go to the tavern.

All exit

End of Prelude.

SCENE: The pleasure gardens attached to the Royal Apartments.

Enter the Apsarā Miśrakeśī flying through the air.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: Having completed my spell of duty guarding Apsarā Pool during the season of pilgrimage to its sacred waters by pious devotees, I have a little time now to see with my own eyes how it goes with the Royal Sage. Śakuntalā is like my own flesh and blood because of my great friendship with Menakā; and Menakā had requested me earlier to do this for the sake of her daughter. (*looking around*) How is it that no preparations are seen in the palace grounds for the commencement of the season's festivities? And today is the day of the Festival? Sure, I have the ability of knowing all that goes on through exercising my powers of mental contemplation; but, out of respect for my friend's high regard for me, I should see it all myself with my own eyes. Therefore, making myself invisible, I shall stay close behind these two girls who seem to be employed to tend the gardens, and learn what has been happening here. (*alights on the ground and waits*)

Enter a female gardener looking at the sprays of mango blossom; another comes behind her.

FIRST GIRL:

O Mango-Blossom, turning from rich copper 2
to pale-green! O loveliness
breathed out by Spring's first fragrant month!
Hail to you! My eyes have been blessed with a sight of you,
auspicious harbinger of the Festival!

SECOND GIRL (*approaching*) : Hallo there, Parabhṛtikā![a] what are you muttering to yourself?

PARABHṚTIKĀ: Ah, my friend, seeing the spray of mango blossom, the little cuckoo is intoxicated—mad.

SECOND GIRL (*with joy*) : You mean Spring is already here?

PARABHṚTIKĀ: Yes, Madhukarikā[b] it is now your time to dance with glancing movements and sing your rapturous melodies.

MADHUKARIKĀ: Let me have your support, dear friend, so that I can stand on tiptoe and pluck one little mango blossom and offer it in worship to the God of Love.

PARABHṚTIKĀ: Certainly, if half the fruit of the worship is mine.

MADHUKARIKĀ: O my dear friend, do you have to ask in so many words.... when our hearts are one, though our bodies may divide us? (*leaning on her friend, she plucks a mango flower*) Ah! How exquisite! Even though this bud hasn't opened its eye as yet, the snapping of its stalk releases a divine perfume. (*folds her hands together in the shape of a dove*) O Lord Love! O Dolphin-Bannered God! I bow before you.

O mango-blossom, here, I offer you to Love 3
who already holds his bow firmly in his hand;
may this flower be the most potent of his five flower-arrows,
to aim at the young wives of men who travel far.

Enter the chamberlain, Pārvatāyana with a toss of the curtain, very angry.

PĀRVATĀYANA: You there, stop, you impudent girl. What do you think you are doing, plucking mango buds when His Majesty has expressly forbidden the celebration of the Spring Festival?

BOTH (*alarmed*): Please, Your Honour, we had not heard about it.

PĀRVATĀYANA: Hm....so, you have not heard about it, is it?....When even

a. Little Cuckoo
b. Little Honeybee

the trees that bloom in the Spring, and the birds nesting in them, seem to have....and show their respect for His Majesty's decree? Just look around:

The mango has long since put out its wealth of buds, 4
but the pollen does not gather golden within:
the amaranth is all set for blossom-time,
but the buds still linger, tight-folded in their sheaths;
though winter is past, the melodious koel,
strangles in his throat his rich burst of song;
even Love hovers uncertain, withdraws timidly,
his arrow half-drawn out of the quiver.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: Now there is no room for doubt; the Royal Sage possesses great powers.

PARABHṚTIKĀ: Honourable Sir, it is only a few days since Mitrā-vasu, the Inspector-General of Police, sent us both to wait on his sister, the Queen; and we have been detailed to perform various duties here in the pleasure-gardens. That's why we had not heard about all this.

PĀRVATĀYANA: Very well; let this not happen again.

BOTH: Your Honour, we feel very curious. If it is proper for people like us to know, can you tell us why His Majesty has forbidden the holding of the Spring Festival, please?

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: Kings are usually fond of festivities; so there has to be a good reason.

PĀRVATĀYANA: Seeing as the matter is common knowledge, there is no reason for not telling you. What! Has the gossip relating to the repudiation of Śakuntalā not reached your ears as yet?

BOTH GIRLS: It has, Your honour; we also heard from our lord's brother-in-law about the finding of the Ring.

PĀRVATĀYANA: Then there is little left to tell. From the moment His Majesty set eyes on the Ring and began to remember that Lady Śakuntalā was truly married by him in secret, and then spurned through some strange lapse of memory, His Majesty has been struck with bitter remorse.

He loathes all beautiful things; to his ministers 5
he is not free of access as before;
he passes nights sleepless; tossing in bed;
to the queens in the Royal apartments,
he extends all formal courtesies,

but addresses them wrongly, mistaking their names;
then, he remains long plunged in painful embarrassment.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: This pleases me.

PĀRVATĀYANA: On account of our lord's uncontrollable desolation, the Festival has been cancelled.

BOTH GIRLS: A very proper decision, we'd say.

A Voice Off-stage: The King, the King; come this way, Your Majesty.

PĀRVATĀYANA (*listening*): Our Lord is headed this way; now go, attend to your work.

THE GIRLS: Yes, your Honour. (*they leave*)

Enter the king dressed as if in mourning, attended by Vetravatī and accompanied by Māḍhavya.

PĀRVATĀYANA (*watching the king*): O how handsome our Lord looks, notwithstanding his grief. Those blessed with fine looks always present a pleasing appearance, whatever the circumstances.

Spurning the splendour of dress and adornment 6
he wears a single bracelet of gold,
now slipping down his forearm:
the lower lip blanched, scorched by his hot breath,
those eyes shorn of their brilliance
by unquiet wakefulness, his form,
glowing with intrinsic lustre, though wasted,
scarcely seems so, but dazzles the eye
like some magnificent gem cunningly fined down
and polished with exquisite art.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ (*scrutinizing the king*): No wonder our dear Śakuntalā though humiliated by his harsh repudiation of her, still pines for him.

VETRAVATĪ: Let His Majesty walk on.

DUḤṢANTA (*pacing slowly in deep thought*):

Rudely awakened by penitent grief 7
this cursed heart, then insensible
when my doe-eyed beloved tried hard
to rouse it from its sleep, is now painfully awake.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: Ah! That poor girl's unhappy lot!

MĀḌHAVYA (*aside*): There he goes again; the Śakuntalā-fit is upon him. How on earth do we get this sickness of his treated?

PĀRVATĀYANA (*approaching*): Hail, Your Majesty. I have inspected the various spots in the pleasure gardens; Your Majesty can safely resort to any of them as you please.

DUḤṢANTA (*to the attendant*): Vetravatī, go, take this message from me to the Chief Minister, The Honourable Piśuna, and say: "Having spent a long sleepless night, I feel unfit to preside today at the Court in the Hall of Justice. Let those cases of our citizens that Your Honour has personally attended to, be written out duly and dispatched to me."

VETRAVATĪ: As His Majesty commands. (*leaves*)

DUḤṢANTA: Pārvatāyana, you may also attend to your business.

PĀRVATĀYANA: As Your Highness commands. (*he exits*)

MĀḌHAVYA: That has done it. There are no more flies buzzing around. Now you can relax in peace and enjoy the gardens so pleasant now with the weather neither chilly nor warm.

DUḤṢANTA: Ah! Māḍhavya, my friend, is it not so very true? That saying? "Misfortunes strike a person all at once through chinks in his armour?" Just look at this :

No sooner is my mind freed from the darkness 8
that eclipsed the memory of my love
for the daughter of the sage
than the mind-born god[c] chooses this moment
to fit the arrow of the mango's blossom
on his bow, O, my friend—and strikes me down.

And what is more:

The seeing of the Ring has restored my memory; 9
having spurned my beloved, without real cause,
I weep for her with remorse, and longing,
now that the fragrant month[d] is here with its delights.

MĀḌHAVYA: How dare Love strike you down? Just wait. I shall destroy his arrow with my stick (*lifts his stick to knock down the spray of mango blossoms.*)

DUḤṢANTA: Splendid; well done; I have witnessed your Brahminic power. Now, my friend, find me a pleasant spot where I can divert my mind watching the flowering vines that resemble my beloved a little.

MĀḌHAVYA: I thought I heard you instructing your attendant, Caturikā, saying to her "I shall pass the hour in the jasmine bower. Bring me the drawing board on which I had begun to paint Lady Śakuntalā's portrait."

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c. Kama, Love or Eros.
d. The first month of spring

DUḤṢANTA: It is the only way there is to console myself. Well then, lead the way to the jasmine bower.

MĀḌHAVYA: This way, come this way, Your Honour. (*they both turn around; Miśrakeśī follows them*).

MĀḌHAVYA: See, here is the bower of the spring jasmine with its marble seat, so secluded it seems to be waiting expectantly for you, extending its silent welcome. Let us enter the bower and sit down there. (*they do so*)

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: I shall stand here hidden behind the vines and take a look at my friend's portrait. Then, I can let her know how great a love her lord bears her. (*stands still*)

DUḤṢANTA (*sighing deeply*): Ah! My dear friend, at this moment all the events surrounding my very first meeting with Śakuntalā are passing through my mind; I spoke to you about it, you remember. However when I disavowed her, you were not there at my side. But even before that day you never once mentioned her name. Did you also forget her.....as I did?

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: It is for this reason that lords of the earth should not allow a companion close to their heart leave their side even for a moment.

MĀḌHAVYA: Oh! I did not forget. But after telling me all about her, at the end you said that it was all in jest. And I, having a lump of clay for brains accepted it. Well, you know, when all is said and done, we have to accept that Fate is all-powerful.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: How true.

DUḤṢANTA (*broods for a while then appeals to Māḍhavya*): Help me, my dear friend, help me.

MĀḌHAVYA: Hey, hey, what's all this? What has come over you, my dear friend? How can noble men allow themselves to be overcome like this by grief? Mountains stand firm in the fiercest storm.

DUḤṢANTA: O my dear friend, when I remember how distraught my love was when she found herself harshly repulsed, I feel totally shorn of all defences. There she was:

> Cruelly spurned by me and starting to follow her kin,
> but sternly halted by the command—'stay'—
> of her father's pupil, like a father to her,
> she turned once again her eyes welling with tears
> on me, O so pitiless!
> How that look burns me like a poisoned dart!

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: O you gods! Such concern for right conduct![e]

MĀḌHAVYA: An idea just struck me. Do you think some celestial being carried off the lady?

DUḤṢANTA: Who else would dare touch a chaste wife? I learnt from her friends that it was the celestial dancer Menakā who gave birth to her. My heart tells me that one of her mother's companions took her away.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: What is surprising is not that he has come out of a state of blank confusion but that he ever got into such a state in the first place.

MĀḌHAVYA: Listen, if that's the case, take heart, Sir. You are sure to be reunited with the lady.

DUḤṢANTA: What makes you say that?

MĀḌHAVYA: Because no mother, or father, can bear to see a daughter separated from her husband for long.

DUḤṢANTA: Ah! My friend,

> Was it a dream? 11
> A magical vision of loveliness?
> A hallucination?
> Or the fruit of my past good deeds?
> Reward in strict measure and no more?
> It is gone—never to return,
> of that I am quite certain.
> Wishes.....they are the banks of rivers,
> Crumbling........caving in.......precipitately.

MĀḌHAVYA: No, no, do not talk like this. Listen; the Ring itself, its finding, proves that a reunion destined to come about will do so in the most unexpected manner.

DUḤṢANTA (*looking at the Ring*) : This thing—that fell off a place so hard to gain—it deserves to be pitied.

> The merit earned by your good deeds, O Ring 12
> is as slender as mine, it seems,

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e. A variant reading has the following comment by Miśrakeśī: Ha! How strange! The commitment we feel for a purpose close to our hearts can be so strong! I actually rejoice to see him suffer.
This comment by Miśrakeśī in the text appears more appropriate after Duḥṣanta's response (10.+4) to Māḍhavya's observation (10.+3)

considering the slim reward you gained.
You won a high place on her fingers whose nails
glow pale-rose like dawn, enchanting –
then alas – you took such a fall.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: If it had been on any other hand it would truly deserve to be pitied. O, my friend, dear Śakuntalā, you are far away. I alone have the happiness of hearing these words so sweet to the ear.

MĀḌHAVYA: Now tell me, dear friend, What was the occasion on which you gave this Signet Ring to the lady?

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: He is voicing the same curiosity that possesses me.

DUḤṢANTA: I'll tell you; listen, my friend; when I was leaving the Holy Groves to return to the capital, my beloved asked me weeping— "When will my revered lord send for me"?

MĀḌHAVYA : And then?

DUḤṢANTA: Then slipping the Ring on her finger, I said to her:

Each day count off one letter of my name 13
engraved on this Ring; when you come to the last,
an escort will present himself, my love,
to lead you to the Antaḥpara of my palace.

But, seized by some strange delusion, I acted cruelly.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: A charming arrangement, no doubt; only Fate stepped in to upset it.

MĀḌHAVYA: How on earth did the Ring enter the carp's mouth as if it were a hook?

DUḤṢANTA: It slipped off your friend's finger when she was worshipping the waters at Śacī's Pool.

MĀḌHAVYA: Ah! That explains it.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: Is that why the Royal sage afraid of committing a sin began having doubts about his marraige to our unfortunate Śakuntalā? On the other hand, does a love like this really need a token of recognition? How can that be?

DUḤṢANTA: Well; let me scold this Ring.

MĀḌHAVYA (*grinning*): I shall also scold this stick. O, stick! Why are you so crooked when I myself am so straight?

DUḤṢANTA (*as if not hearing him*):

How could you abandon that hand 14
with its delicate curving fingers,
to drown in the water, O, Ring?

But come to think of it;

A mindless thing is unmindful of perfection—But I!
How could I have brushed aside my sweet love?

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: Just what I was about to say; he has said it himself.

MĀḌHAVYA: Why do I have to be left to die of hunger? Always?

DUḤṢANTA (*paying no attention to Māḍhavya's words*): My darling! Pity this man whose heart burns with bitter remorse for having abandoned you without any justification. Let him see you again.

Enter Caturikā with a painting.[46]

CATURIKĀ: Your Majesty, here is the portrait of the queen. (*she shows him the board*).

DUḤṢANTA (*gazing at it*): Aho! What a beautiful subject for a painting: See,

A pair of long, expansive eyes, 15
graceful eyebrows curving like tendrils,
the lower lip bathed in the radiance of smiles
bright as moonlight;
the upper, luscious, glowing rose-hued
with the sheen of the jujube's berries—
this is her face—even in a picture
it seems to speak—breathing out enchanting beauty.

MĀḌHAVYA (*looking at it*): O, what a lovely painting, full of feeling; my eyes almost trip over those ups and downs in the landscape. Expecting it to come alive, I am eager to start a conversation with it—why say more.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: What an accomplished artist the Royal Sage is; I could swear that my dear friend stands there before me.

DUḤṢANTA: My friend,

Whatever did not come out right was done again; 16
yet this painting but hints at her glowing beauty.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: His love has grown stronger through repentance, it seems.

DUḤṢANTA (*sighing*):

Once when she stood before my eyes, I spurned her; 17
and now I adore her painted in a picture;
having passed by a full-flowing stream,
I pant after a mirage, my friend.

MĀḌHAVYA: I see three figures here, all beautiful; which one is Lady Śakuntalā?

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: The poor man has no idea of my friend's beauty. Of what use is his sight if he cannot single out beauty such as hers!

DUḤṢANTA: Come on, make a guess. Which one do you think is she?

MĀḌHAVYA (*contemplates the painting for sometime*): This one, I think ....painted here standing beside the Aśoka tree whose soft young leaves glisten sprayed with water....the hair knot loosened, the flowers in her lovely mass of hair falling off....drops of sweat forming on her face......those vine-like arms drooping limp.....the knot of her lower garment coming undone...... looking rather tired....this is Lady Śakuntalā. The other two are her friends, I guess.

DUḤṢANTA: You are clever, Sir. Do you see the marks of my emotion right here?

Her portrait is soiled round the edges 18
from the marks made by my sweating fingers.
Here, on her cheek where a tear from my eye fell,
the paint has swelled and blistered.

Caturikā, the landscape is only partly finished. Go, get my box of paints.

CATURIKĀ: Sir, Māḍhavya, hold the painting until I return.

DUḤṢANTA : I shall hold it myself. (*takes it from her; she leaves*).

MĀḌHAVYA: Tell me, my friend, what other details have still to be drawn?

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: I am sure he would want to paint some favourite spot that my dear friend used to haunt.

DUḤṢANTA:

The river Mālinī has yet to be drawn 19
where pairs of wild geese rest on sandy banks;
and , encircling the river, the holy slopes
of Gaurī's[f] Parent where deer recline;
I wish to paint a doe rubbing her left eye
on the horn of a black buck
as well, under a tree
where bark garments hang from branches to dry.

MĀḌHAVYA (*aside*): The way he goes on, I can just see him filling up the entire painting with scores of long-beards.

DUḤṢANTA: Friend, see, I have forgotten something—Śakuntalā's ornaments.

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f. The Bright Goddess also known as Pārvatī (*mountain-born*)

The Śirīṣa blossom nestling at her ear, 20
its filaments hanging down her cheek;
a necklace of lotus-fibres
soft as autumnal moonbeams,
lying snug between her breasts;
these are not yet drawn, my friend.

MĀḌHAVYA: Why does the lady appear unduly alarmed, covering her face with a hand radiant as a red lotus, if I may ask? (*looks closely*) O yes, now I see; there's that bastard, that honey-thief, that rogue bee, coveting the lotus of her face.

DUḤṢANTA: Drive that impertinent fellow away.

MĀḌHAVYA: Who else but Your Honour can chastise shameless knaves?

DUḤṢANTA: Yes, you are right. Hey you! You there; you are the welcome guest of flowering vines. Why do you bother to keep whirling round her?

There, on that flower sits Lady Honeybee 21
waiting, enamoured of Your Honour;
though thirsty, she will not drink
the sweet honey till you join her.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: The bee has been most courteously dismissed.

MĀḌHAVYA: This sort of creature can turn nasty if driven away.

DUḤṢANTA (*angrily*): You rogue! You refuse to obey my command, is that so? Then hear me now:

You dare bite my beloved's lower lip—a ripe
bimba fruit— 22
alluring as the fresh shoots of a tender sapling—
the lip I drank of so tenderly celebrating love's ecstatic festival—
and I'll have you shut up, O bee, in the heart of a lotus.

MĀḌHAVYA: O what a terrible punishment (*laughing*) And yet the fellow does not buzz off, (*speaks to himself*) He is quite mad....and I.... constantly in his company....I am also going crazy.

DUḤṢANTA: Look. He has been commanded to leave; yet he hangs around.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: Alas! The pity of it all! How passionate love can affect the steadiest mind...

MĀḌHAVYA: Come, come, my friend. This is just a painting.

DUḤṢANTA: Just a painting?

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: He expresses the very same thought that is running in my

head.[g] But, the king was living in another world.

DUḤṢANTA : O, my friend Māḍhavya! What gratuitous cruelty is this? How could you do this to me?

With my heart wholly lost in her I felt 23
as if she stood right here before my eyes.
What supreme joy was mine then!
By presenting me with the harsh reality
you have re-presented my beloved
as a lifeless image once again.

The king sheds tears.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: His conduct, before and now.....what a strange pattern of inconsistency they weave!

DUḤṢANTA: What unrelenting anguish am I being subjected to, my friend!

Denied sleep I cannot dream 24
of holding her in my arms.
And my tears will not let me gaze on her
even re-presented in a painting.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: You have completely wiped away Śakuntalā's sorrow at being repudiated. I have seen it for myself.

Caturikā enters hurriedly.

CATURIKĀ: Your Majesty......just as I was coming here with the box of paints....

DUḤṢANTA: What happened?

CATURIKĀ: Her Majesty, Queen Vasumatī accompanied by her maid Piṅgalikā met me and snatched the box out of my hands, saying, "I shall take this to my revered lord myself."

MĀḌHAVYA: And how did you yourself escape?

CATURIKĀ: While the maid was disentangling the Queen's veil that was caught on some twigs, I slipped away.

A Voice Backstage: This way, Your Royal Highness, this way.

MĀḌHAVYA (*listening*): Here comes the tigress of the Antaḥpara ready to pounce on Caturikā and gobble her up as if she were a mere morsel of a doe.

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g. A variant reading suggests a different meaning:
MIŚRAKEŚĪ: I myself woke up to that realization just this moment. How hard for him who in painting her portrait was re-living an experience.

DUHṢANTA: Māḍhavya, my friend, the Queen is approaching; she is very conscious of the high honour I hold her in. You had better look after this portrait. Keep it safe.

MĀḌHAVYA: Keep you safe, you mean. (*picks up the painting*) If you manage to get away from the entrapments of the Antaḥpara, shout for me in the Palace of Clouds. I'll hide this where only the pigeons can get a look in.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: Although his heart belongs to someone else now, the king is very considerate it seems to his first love. He is a man of steady affections.[h]

An attendant enters with some documents.

ATTENDANT: Victory to our lord! Victory to our lord!

DUHṢANTA: Vetravatī, did you meet Queen Vasumatī on your way here?

VETRAVATĪ: Yes, my lord; but seeing me carrying documents, Her Majesty turned back.

DUHṢANTA: Her Majesty is well aware of the proprieties; she would take great care not to interrupt me in my work.

VETRAVATĪ: The Chief Minister begs to make this submission to His Majesty. "The work relating to revenue being very heavy, only one civil case could be reviewed. The documents are sent herewith for His Majesty's consideration."

DUHṢANTA: Here, show me the documents.

Vetravatī hands a scroll to the king.

DUHṢANTA (*unrolls the scroll and reads it out*): "The Chief Minster lays these facts before His Majesty: A wealthy merchant-prince by the name of Dhanavṛddhi who carried on a flourishing trade overseas is now known to have been lost in a shipwreck. The unfortunate man is childless. His fortune runs into crores. As of now all this wealth becomes state property. We await His majesty's decision."

The King becomes greatly agitated.

DUHṢANTA: Ha! Childlessness! What unhappiness it brings! Listen, Vetravati, since the merchant was so wealthy he must have had many wives. Let inquiries be made to find out if anyone of his wives is currently pregnant.

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h. A variant reading has this: But he appears rather cold and distant towards the Queen.

VETRAVATĪ: Sire, we have been informed that one of them, the daughter of a wealthy merchant-prince of Sāketa had the Pumsavana Rites[47] duly performed quite recently.

DUḤṢANTA: In that case the child in the womb has the right to his father's property. Let the Chief Minister be informed to this effect.

VETRAVATĪ: Yes, my lord, I shall deliver your instructions forthwith. (*prepares to leave*)

DUḤṢANTA: Wait; come here.

VETRAVATĪ (*returning*): Yes, Your Majesty.

DUḤṢANTA: What does it matter whether there is an heir or not:

> Proclaim thus to my subjects: "Whosoever 25
> suffers the loss of one dearly loved,
> shall find in Duḥṣanta one to take his place
> in all relations deemed lawful and holy."

VETRAVATĪ: This proclamation shall be made. (*she leaves, then re-enters.*) My lord, your proclamation was received with joy by the leading citizens, like rain at the proper time.

DUḤṢANTA (*heaving a deep sigh*) : This is how the wealth of families rendered supportless by the break in succession passes to strangers when the life of the head of the family comes to an end. And this again will be the fate of the fortunes of Puru's lineage when my own end comes.

VETRAVATĪ: Perish such inauspicious thoughts.

DUḤṢANTA: A curse on me for turning my back on Fortune when she came to me.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: It is my dear friend alone whom he has in mind when he reproaches himself—I have no doubt.

DUḤṢANTA:

> My wife by right, the firm base of my lineage, 26
> abandoned, though I had implanted myself in her—
> like the rich Earth sown with seed in due season— deserted
> before the promise of the rich harvest came true.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: She will not be deserted by you any longer.

CATURIKĀ (*aside*): Lady, our lord is now doubly desolated as a result of the Chief Minister sending him that document. Perhaps you ought to go to the Palace of Clouds and fetch His Honour Māḍhavya to console His Majesty.

VETRAVATĪ: An excellent idea. (*she leaves*)

DUḤṢANTA: O misery! The shades of Duḥṣanta's ancestors are beset by mounting doubts, wondering:

"After him, who in our line will prepare 27
with ordained rites prescribed in the sacred texts
and offer us the oblations of remembrance—"
with the hallowed water poured out by me, childless,
my ancestors must wash their tears off—
and drink what remains.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: Though there is light, because it is covered, the good king remains shrouded in darkness.

CATURIKĀ: Sire, do not torture yourself any further. You are in the prime of life and there will be fine sons born to your other queens; they will discharge your debts to the ancestors. (*to herself*) His Majesty pays no heed to my words. But then it is the right medicine that can cure the disease.

DUḤṢANTA (*overcome by sorrow*): From earliest times:

This dynasty of Puru, pure from its roots, 28
descending in one uninterrupted succession,
will now have its setting in my life, unfruitful,
like Saraswatī's stream lost in barbarous sandy wastes.

He loses consciousness.

CATURIKĀ (*alarmed*): Courage, my lord, courage.

MIŚRAKEŚĪ: Should I not free him now from his grief? No, I had better not. For I have heard the Mother of Gods speak of this when consoling Śakuntalā—heard from her own lips that the gods themselves in their concern for the continuity of the sacrifices and to secure their own share in them, would see to it that before long, her lord welcomes Śakuntalā as his lawful wedded wife. Well, I should not really linger here any more; let me go and acquaint my dear friend with the happy turn of events. That should cheer her up. (*she ascends into the sky and flies away.*)

A Voice Off-stage: Help! A sacrilege, a sacrilege.

DUḤṢANTA (*regaining consciousness*): Hey! What's that; it sounds like Māḍhavya's piteous call for help.

CATURIKĀ: Sire, I do hope poor Māḍhavya hasn't been caught red-handed by the worthy madam Piṅgalikā with the painting in his possession.

DUḤṢANTA: Go, Caturikā, go and convey my displeasure to the Queen

for not disciplining her servants.

CATURIKĀ: As Your Majesty commands (*she leaves.*)

The Same Voice Off-stage: Help! A sacrilege, a sacrilege.

DUḤṢANTA: The brāhmaṇa's voice sounds truly altered by terror....Ho there, who's there?

PĀRVATĀYANA (*entering*): Your commands, Majesty.

DUḤṢANTA: Go, and find out why our little Māḍhavya is crying out so piteously.

PĀRVATĀYANA: I shall find out. (*he goes out, then returns in great agitation.*)

DUḤṢANTA: Pārvatāyana, nothing terrible has happened, I trust?

PĀRVATĀYANA: Yes, it has, Sire.

DUḤṢANTA: Why are you trembling like this? I see you—

Already trembling from age, 29
your limbs now tremble even more
like a pipal tree shaken
by the wind blowing through it.

PĀRVATĀYANA: His Majesty should come and save his friend.

DUḤṢANTA: Save him from what?

PĀRVATĀYANA: From grave danger.

DUḤṢANTA: Make your meaning clear, man.

PĀRVATĀYANA: The palace known as the Palace of Clouds....... from where one can see far into the distance, in all directions.....

DUḤṢANTA: Yes, what of it?

PĀRVATĀYANA:

From its topmost turret which even the palace-peacocks 30
cannot fly up to without frequent pauses,
some being, invisible,
has seized your friend and carried him off.

DUḤṢANTA (*getting up at once*): Ah! My own home...haunted by evil spirits? But it is known that kingship bears responsibility for many offences.

Each day of our own life we slip and fall into error 31
unknowing through negligence;
how then can we fully know what paths
the life of each one of our subjects takes?

A Voice In The Background: Ho! Protect me, here; protect me, here.

DUḤṢANTA (*listening, begins to walk fast*): My friend, don't be afraid.

The Voice In The Background : How can I not be afraid....when someone is forcing my head back....and trying to break my neck into bits as if it were a piece of sugarcane.

DUḤṢANTA (*casting a glance around*): My bow, bring my bow.

Enter a Kirātī, a female bodyguard, carrying the bow.

KIRĀTĪ: Sire, here is your bow and arrows and your wrist-guard.

The king takes them from her.

A Voice Off-Stage:

Thirsting for the fresh blood that will gush from
your throat, 32
I shall kill you here, as a tiger kills the animal
struggling in its grasp; let Duḥṣanta who wields his bow
to free the distressed of their fear now be your refuge.

DUḤṢANTA (*angrily*): How dare he address me thus. Ha! Hold, you foul eater of corpses. From this instant you will cease to live. (*stringing his bow*) Pārvatāyana, lead the way to the staircase.

PĀRVATĀYANA: This way, this way, Your Majesty.

All proceed in great haste.

DUḤṢANTA (*looking all around*): But this place is completely empty.

A Voice Off-Stage: Protect me, protect me. I can see you, but alas! You cannot see me....like a mouse in a cat's paw, I despair for my life.

DUḤṢANTA: Hey! You! You who wax arrogant possessed of the powers of invisibility! Do you imagine that my missile cannot see you either? Just wait. And don't be too confident that you can safely hide behind my friend. I am activating that missile[48]—

Which shall strike you who deserves to die, and save him, 33
the twice-born who deserves to be saved;
just as the swan extracts and imbibes the milk,
leaving behind the water mixed with it.

Saying this he aims his weapon; then enter Mātali and Māḍhavya with him.

MĀTALI: May you be blessed with long life!

The Dānavas are your arrows' target 34
by Indra ordained; on them should you bend your bow.
The noble direct towards their friends
serene eyes and gentle—not cruel arrows.

DUḤṢANTA (*de-activating his missile with alacrity*): Ah! It's you, Mātali.

welcome, welcome to the charioteer of the Lord of the Immortals.

MĀḌHAVYA: Hm......so.......he was about to slay me as if I were a sacrificial beast....and here.......you welcome him with open arms.

MĀTALI (*smiling*): Gracious lord, now let me tell you why Indra has sent me.

DUḤṢANTA: I am all attention.

MĀTALI: There is a race of Dānavas, the invincible brood of the demon Kālanemi.

DUḤṢANTA: I once heard of them from Nārada.

MĀTALI:

Destined for destruction at your hands alone 35
in the battle's forefront, they are inviolable
before your comrade, the Lord of a Hundred Powers.[j]
Where the Sun with His spreading beams
cannot spring forth to break Night's massed darkness,
the Moon appears and chases it away.

So let Your Honour mount the celestial chariot as you are with your bow ready and strung and ride forth to victory.

DUḤṢANTA: I am indeed highly honoured by this singular mark of Indra's favour. But tell me, Mātali, why did you act the way your did towards poor Māḍhavya?

MĀTALI: O, I shall explain that too. I found you deeply dejected on account of some sorrow or other. Accordingly, I acted to rouse your anger. For:

A fire stirred blazes brightly, 36
a cobra provoked spreads its hood;
every form of life possessed of energy
glows into brilliance invariably, when roused.

DUḤṢANTA (*aside*): My friend, the command of the Lord of Heaven cannot be transgressed. So, go to the Chief Minister, Piśuna, acquaint him with all that has transpired and give him this message from me:

Let your wisdom alone protect the
subjects while I am away; 37
this drawn bow of mine other duties
has to accomplish.

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j. Indra.

MĀḌHAVYA: As Your Honour commands. (*he leaves.*)

MĀTALI: Let my gracious lord mount the chariot. (*the king does so.*)

All exit.

End of Act Six
Entitled
Separation from Śakuntalā

ACT SEVEN

SCENE: First the celestial regions; then the Hermitage of Mārīca in the region of Hemakūta.[a]

Enter King Duḥṣanta and Mātali by the Aerial Path, mounted on Indra's chariot.

DUḤṢANTA: Mātali, although I have carried out the mission entrusted to me by Indra, the Munificent, I feel that I have rendered him too slight a service to merit that special welcome he accorded me.

MĀTALI (*smiling*): It seems neither of you feels truly gratified.

To you the services you rendered Indra, 1
seem slight beside the great honours you received.
While he, impressed by your glorious deeds regards
as trifling the honours he bestowed upon you.

DUḤṢANTA: O no, Mātali, that's not so; the honour he did me at the time of my leave-taking went far beyond my wildest expectations. Mark you, in the presence of all the assembled Immortals, he made me share his royal seat. And:

Glancing up with a smile at Jayanta, his son, 2
who stood beside him longing inwardly for the same,
Hari[b] placed round my neck the Mandāra-garland,
tinged with golden sandal that had rubbed off his chest.

MĀTALI: What indeed does Your Honour not deserve that the Lord of the Immortals can bestow? Just think:

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a. Golden Peak.
b. Indra.

Once before, Paradise was rid of thorns, the Dānavas, 3
by the fierce claws of godhead descended lion-like:
now, once again it is freed by your
smooth streamlined arrows,
for Hari to savour his pleasures in peace.

DUḤṢANTA: But Mātali, in this case, the glory of the Lord of Hundred Powers[c] alone, is to be celebrated.

Those delegated to perform momentous deeds, 4
know them, O Mātali, to succeed
only by virtue of the high esteem
their masters hold them in.
Could Aruṇa dispel darkness if the thousand-rayed Sun
did not place him in the forefront as His charioteer?

MĀTALI: Such words accord with the nobility of your mind, Sire. (*drives the chariot a little further*) Gracious Prince, can you see from here how the splendour of your fame spreads across the high vault of the sky?

With pigments left from cosmetics blended 5
for the lovely women of Paradise,
celestials inscribe on scrolls
that hang from the Wish-Granting Vine,
your deeds of glory that form the themes
for the well-wrought poems they sing.

DUḤṢANTA: Mātali, the other day during our ascent into the ethereal regions, I was burning with such ardour to meet and do battle with the Dānavas that I did not pay much attention to the Celestial Path we were traversing. So, tell me, which of the Paths of the Seven Winds[49] are we on now?

MĀTALI:

The Path of the Wind Pravaha, hallowed 6
by Viṣṇu's wide-stepping second stride,
and thereby free of all worldly taints:
its current bears along the Triple-Streamed Gaṅgā
—her home and resting place the firmament—
and propels on their circling course
the luminous orbs of the sky, spraying
their beams of light evenly around.

DUḤṢANTA: No wonder then that my inmost being and my senses turning outwards experience such tranquillity. (*looking down at the wheels*)

c. Indra.

We have descended into the Path of the Clouds, I believe, Mātali.

MĀTALI (*smiling*): How do you know that?

DUḤṢANTA:

The rims of the wheels glisten misted with spray; 7
cātaka birds dart in and out through their spokes;
the horses gleam bathed by flickers of lightning;
your chariot now rides over clouds
whose bellies are swollen with rain.

MĀTALI: In an instant Your Honour will be landing on the Earth that you rule over.

DUḤṢANTA (*looking down again*): Mātali, see with what rapidity we are descending; the world of mortals presents a most marvellous sight. Look:—

As the mountains rear upwards the land sinks rapidly 8
off their great peaks; trees whose forms were
merged within the dense foliage
emerge distinct as their branched shoulders
thrust into view;
those fine lines are now seen as rivers brimming with waters:
see how the Earth looms at my side
as if some mighty hand had flung her up to me.

MĀTALI: An acute observation, Sire. (*looking down with profound admiration*) O, what enchanting beauty is this, of the Earth!

DUḤṢANTA: Mātali, what range of mountains is that, glowing with liquid gold, stretching like a bar of clouds drenched in sunset colours and plunging deep into the eastern and western oceans?

MĀTALI: That range of mountains, Your Honour, is known as Hemakūta, the home of Kimpuruṣas; it is there that the highest forms of penance are wrought. And listen further, Gracious Prince:—

The Lord of Beings, born of the light 9
sprung from the Self-Existent Itself,
He, the revered Parent of Devas and Dānavas,
leads with his consort a life of penance here.

DUḤṢANTA (*speaking in reverential tones*) In that case I should pay my respects to His Supreme Holiness before proceeding any further; such a rare opportunity for receiving blessings must not be passed by.

MĀTALI: An excellent thought, Sire. (*mimes descent of the chariot*) There, we have landed.

DUḤṢANTA (*in a tone of utmost wonder*): How's this, Mātali:—

The chariot's wheels glide noiseless; 10
no jolting is felt while landing;
no dust is seen whirling around;
the wheels do not touch the Earth's surface.

MĀTALI: Nothing marks the chariot's descent. This, needless to say is the difference, gracious lord, between Indra's chariot and that of Your Honour.

DUḤṢANTA: Mātali, where exactly is sage Mārīca's Hermitage?

MĀTALI (*points with his hand*): There,

Where that sage stands, motionless as a post, 11
facing the noonday sun, his form half-buried in an anthill;
a snake's cast-off skin serving as a second sacred thread;
twining tendrils of a dried-up vine squeezing his throat tight;
wearing coiled on his head a tangled mass of matted hair
where birds build nests as dishevelled strands
fall loose about his shoulders.

DUḤṢANTA: O, Practiser of Harsh Penance! I bow humbly to you.

MĀTALI (*pulling in the reins*): Now, gracious lord, we are entering the Hermitage of Prajāpati, where his consort Aditi tends the young Mandāra trees herself.

DUḤṢANTA: This is a place more blissful than Svarga[d] itself. I feel as if I am immersed in a pool of ambrosia.

MĀTALI (*brings the chariot to a stop*): You may dismount, gracious lord.

DUḤṢANTA (*dismounts*): And you, Sir?

MĀTALI: After checking that the chariot is on level ground and properly secured, I shall also dismount. (*does so*) Gracious lord, come this way; look around. These are the penance groves of the Siddha Munis.[e]

DUḤṢANTA: I look around at the penance groves and at the Seers; and I am filled with wonder.

In groves where trees abound that grant all desires, 12
air is the sole means of life-support for these Seers;
ablutions for holy rites are performed in waters
that glow with the sheen of golden lotuses;

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d. The world of light.
e. Perfected Seers who observe a vow of silence

meditations are practised in jewelled caves
and restraint in the presence of celestial nymphs.
These Seers lead lives of penance in this place
that other ascetics seek to win through penances.

MĀTALI: The aims of the truly great soar high. (*he walks around and speaks in the air*) Venerable Śākalya, how is the Holy Mārīca occupied now? (*as if listening to a reply*) Ah, I see; that questioned by Aditi, daughter of Dakṣa, about the conduct of a virtuous wife, he is expounding these truths to her and the wives of other sages? I think we should wait till the discourse is finished. (*addressing the king*) Sire, Why don't you stay in the shade of this Aśoka tree, while I go and wait for the opportune moment to announce your arrival to Indra's parent.

DUḤṢANTA: Yes, whatever you think best. (*Mātali exits*)

DUḤṢANTA (*indicates feeling a good omen*):

I see no hope for my fondest wish— 13
yet you throb, O, my arm, all in vain.
Good Fortune once brushed aside
turns to misfortune without fail.

Voice Off-stage: No, don't do that; don't be so wayward; his true nature repeatedly breaks out.

DUḤṢANTA (*listening*): This is hardly a place for undisciplined behaviour; who is being rebuked, I wonder. (*following in the direction of the voice, exclaims in astonishment.*) And whom have we here? Just a child...he is being held back by hermit women...his strength is certainly not that of a child.

To amuse himself in play, he pulls 14
roughly from its mother's half-sucked teat,
a lion's cub; tousling its soft mane
he drags it along by sheer force.

Enter as described a little boy followed by two hermit women.

BOY: Come little lion, come, open wide your jaws; I wish to count your teeth.

FIRST HERMIT LADY: O you naughty boy, why do you hurt our animals that we love tenderly like our own children? Really....each day your ways become wilder and more wayward. The sages have well named you Sarva-Damana.[f]

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f. All-Tamer.

DUHṢANTA: Who can this child be for whom I feel an affection as if he were my own? (*reflecting*) O well, I guess that being childless, my heart fills with tenderness for him.

SECOND LADY: The lioness over there will spring on you if you don't let go of her little one, you know?

BOY (*grinning*): O what a shame! I am really scared now. (*pouts his lower lip.*)

DUHṢANTA:

This boy strikes me as the tiny germ 15
of mighty valour that waits
like a fiery spark for kindling,
before it bursts into blazing fire.

FIRST LADY: Darling, let go of this little lion cub; I shall give you something else to play with.

BOY: What is that? Give it to me. (*holds out his right hand*)

DUHṢANTA (*looks in astonishment at the boy's outstretched hand*): Why, this is incredible, he bears on his palm the mark of a Sovereign of the World.

With fingers close knit, palm slightly hollowed, 16
the hand he stretches out in eager expectation
to hold the wished-for plaything,
resembles a single lotus bud,
its petals tightly shut,
just prized open by Dawn's first flush of rose.

SECOND LADY: Suvratā, we cannot fob this child off with mere promises; so go to my cottage, you will find there a clay peacock painted in many colours that once belonged to Mankaṇaka, the child of one of the hermits. Bring it and give it to him.

FIRST LADY: Very well. (*she exits*)

BOY: In the meantime I shall play with this little lion, shan't I? (*looks at the ascetic lady and laughs*)

DUHṢANTA: O how my heart goes out to this wayward little fellow. (*sighs*)

Blessed are they whose garments get soiled 17
from the dust of the limbs of their little sons
who clamour in words sweetly indistinct,
to be lifted on to their father's laps;
and who for no reason laugh
to reveal glimpses of their budding teeth.

SECOND LADY (*shaking her forefinger at the child*): Very well, so you won't listen to me. (*turns around to look for help*) Is any one of the younger hermits around? (*notices the king*) Gracious Sir, please come and free this little lion cub from the iron grip of this little boy who takes a childish pleasure in tormenting it.

DUHṢANTA (*approaches, smiling*): Listen, son of a great sage:

Why do you act in this wanton manner 18
alien to the life of a hermitage
where the spirit finds its tranquil home?
Why do you flout that rule of gentleness
towards all living things,
like the young of a black serpent that spoils
for other creatures, the pleasant sanctuary
of the fragrant sandalwood tree?

SECOND LADY: Gracious Sir, he is not the son of a sage.

DUHṢANTA: His actions that suit his appearance proclaim loudly that he is not. But meeting him in a place such as this, I thought he might be. (*doing what was requested of him, the king feels the touch of the child, and speaks to himself*):

If such pleasure can thrill through my whole body 19
from a touch of this child—a stranger's offspring—
what bliss must he not then bring to the heart
of the lucky man from whose loins he has sprung?

SECOND LADY: How extrordinary! Oh! It is a marvel!

DUHṢANTA: What is ?

SECOND LADY: The likeness, Gracious Sir! The likeness of this boy's appearance to yours, even though you are not related! It astonishes me. Further, wild as he is, he does not shy away from you who are a stranger to him; I am amazed by that.

DUHṢANTA (*fondling the child*): If he is not the son of a hermit, to which family does he belong?

SECOND LADY: Puru's family.

DUHṢANTA (*to himself*): The same as mine? That *is* strange. Therefore the noble lady fancies a resemblance between us. It's true though that the descendants of Puru observe one last family vow.

As rulers of the earth they wish to pass their early years 20
in mansions abounding in sensuous delights.
Thereafter they make the roots of trees their home
and live bound by the hermit's single vow.

(*aloud*) : But mortals cannot reach these regions on their own, noble lady.

SECOND LADY: Yes, Gracious Sir; what you say is true. But this boy's mother related as she was to an Apsarā, gave birth to him here in this Hermitage presided over by the Father of the Immortals.

DUḤṢANTA (*aside*): My hopes are stirred a second time running. (*aloud.*) And the name of the Royal Sage whose wife his noble mother is, if I may ask?

SECOND LADY: Who would ever think of even uttering the name of one who abandoned his lawful wife.

DUḤṢANTA (*to himself*): The remark points straight at me, I'm afraid. If I could only ask the name of the boy's mother. (*Reflecting*) No, I shouldn't. It is highly improper to exhibit curiosity about another man's wife.

Enter first hermit lady with the clay peacock in her hand.

FIRST LADY: Look, Sarvadamana, see how pretty the Śakunta[g] is.

BOY (*looking around*): Mamma, Mamma, where is she?

Both women laugh.

FIRST LADY: So fond is he of his mother that the similarity in sound of the two words has misled him.

SECOND LADY: Darling, she means this clay peacock; she was pointing out to you how pretty the toy is.

DUḤṢANTA (*to himself*): So, his mother's name is Śakuntalā; but it is not an uncommon name. Will these events turn out after all to be a mirage that will lead me into further misery?

BOY: Yes, dear Aunt, it is; I like this pretty peacock. (*takes the toy from her.*)

FIRST LADY (*in great alarm*): Look, look, what has happened, great gods; the protective amulet—it is not on his wrist—

DUḤṢANTA: O, please don't be alarmed, worshipful ladies; here it is. It must have slipped off during his playful scuffle with the lion cub. (*stoops to pick it up*)

BOTH LADIES: No, no, don't, don't touch it....that is very strange...he has picked it up. (*they clasp their hands on their bosoms and stare at each other in amazement.*)

g. A bird. The Sanskrit term here is, *Śakunta-Lāvaṇya,* lit. meaning "The charming bird"

DUḤṢANTA: Why did you ask me not to touch it?

FIRST LADY: Great Lord, listen: this is an amulet of divine power, made out of a herb of immense virtue, named 'Aparājitā'[h] and it was tied on the child's wrist at the time of his natal rites, by His Holiness Mārīca. If it falls on the ground, no one except himself or his parents can safely pick it up.

DUḤṢANTA: And ....if some one else does?

FIRST LADY: It is transformed at once into a serpent that bites him.

DUḤṢANTA: And have you worthy ladies seen this happen? With your own eyes?

BOTH: Many times.

DUḤṢANTA (*overcome with joy*): How can I not rejoice with my whole heart that at this moment, my heart's desire has at last found its fulfillment. (*he embraces the child*)

SECOND LADY: Suvratā, come, let us go straight to Śakuntalā who is engaged in the unfailing performance of her ritual vows and inform her of all that has happened.

Both exit.

BOY: Let me go, let me go; I wish to go to my Mamma.

DUḤṢANTA: My little son, we shall both go together to your mother and make her happy, shall we?

BOY: You are not my father; Duḥṣanta is my father.

DUḤṢANTA (*with a smile*): His hot rebuttal is the last bit of proof I need.

Enter Śakuntalā with her hair done in a single braid.[50]

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Even after I was told that Sarvadamana's amulet did not turn immediately into a serpent, I was afraid to believe that good fortune would greet me again....but I do remember Miśrakeśī mentioning something that hinted at just such a possibility.

DUḤṢANTA (*sees Śakuntalā*): Ha! Here is the Lady Śakuntalā...it is *she*;..... 21

Dressed in plain dusky grey garments,
her face fined thin observing strictest vows,
and wearing her hair in a single braid;
pure and upright she continues to keep

h. Invincible.

the long and cruel vow of separation
from me who acted with heartless cruelty towards her.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*seeing the king pale with remorse*): This does not seem to be my noble lord. Who then is this man? Defiling by his embrace my child who was protected by the sanctified amulet?

BOY (*running to his mother*): Dearest Mamma, here is some stranger who calls me his little son.

DUḤṢANTA: My beloved, the cruelty I showed you has come full circle now; it is I who have to plead now to be *recognized* by you.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*to herself*): Take courage, O my heart; envious Fate seems to have relented at last; this is indeed my noble lord.

DUḤṢANTA: Dear love:—

The light of memory has pierced through 22
the sightless night of my dark delusion;
by fortune's grace, you now stand before me,
O Lady of the most gracious face,
like Rohiṇī in conjunction with the Moon
appearing at the end of an eclipse.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Hail! Vic......(*breaks off in the middle, her voice choked by tears*)

DUḤṢANTA:

Though the greeting of 'victory' 23
was strangled by your tears, I have more than won—
for my eyes have looked upon your face
with their pale, unadorned, parted lips.

BOY: Who is this, Mamma, who is this?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Ask your Destiny, my little one. (*weeps bitterly*)

DUḤṢANTA:

Cast off from your heart, O lovely lady, 24
the bitter pain of cruel rejection.
Believe that some strange overpowering blank confusion
took hold of my heart on that fateful day.
Place a wreath on a blind man's brows
and he tears it off, fearing it to be a snake:
it so happens that minds wrought upon by utter darkness
meet the good and beautiful with a perverse response.

With these words, the king falls at her feet.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: O my lord, rise. It must be that I had to reap the consequences of some wrongdoing on my part in a former birth;

otherwise how could my noble lord, so compassionate by nature, have acted in such an unfeeling manner towards me.

The king rises.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: How did the memory of this most unhappy person return to you, my lord?

DUḤṢANTA: Once I have plucked this wounding dart of grief from my heart, I shall tell you all.

O fair lady! The teardrop that once stood
trembling on your lower lip
—and I watched uncaring, lost in delusion—
while it still clings to your gently-curving lashes,
I shall now wipe away, my beloved,
to free myself of remorse.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*as he wipes away her tears, notices the Ring*): O my revered lord, this is the Ring.

DUḤṢANTA: Yes, and it was its amazing recovery that restored my memory.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Where I failed in convincing my revered lord, this thing has succeeded, and done just that.

DUḤṢANTA: Then let the vine receive once more the blossom that is the symbol of its union with the springtime.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: No, no, my lord, I don't trust it. Let my lord wear it himself.

Enter Mātali.

MĀTALI: Indeed, Fortune has blessed you, gracious lord, by granting you the happiness of reunion with your lawfully wedded wife and seeing the face of your son.

DUḤṢANTA: My cherished desires have more than amply borne fruit because their fulfillment has been brought about through the aid of my friend. Mātali, tell me, do you think that the Destroyer of Darkness[j] knew this would happen?

MĀTALI (*with a smile*): What is beyond the knowing of the Lords of the Universe? Come, Sir, His Holiness Mārīca is waiting to receive you.

DUḤṢANTA: Dearest, hold our child, I wish to present myself before His Holiness with you leading the way.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: I feel that it is indecorous to appear before elders in the company of my husband.

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j. Indra.

DUḤṢANTA: It is the proper way of doing things on auspicious occasions; come, my love.

All turn around; the scene presents Mārīca seated with Aditi by his side.

MĀRĪCA (*seeing the king*): Look! Daughter of Dakṣa!

Here stands the one who leads in battles 26
the forces of your son, Indra.
Known as Duḥṣanta, he is Lord of the Earth.
His bow has taken over the tasks
of Maghona's[k] myriad-pointed thunderbolt
turning it into a mere ornament.

ADITI: His appearance proclaims his greatness.

MĀTALI: Gracious lord, here, are the Parents of the Universe looking at you with eyes misted with affection as for a son. Approach them, Sir.

DUḤṢANTA: Mātali,

Is this the Pair? 27
Sprung from Dakṣa and Marīcī,
at just one remove from The Creator,[l]
that seers extol as The Cause of the Effulgence
manifested in Twelve Forms, the sun?
The Pair that begot the Protector[m] of the Triple-World
and Lord of the Devas who share the Sacrifice?
In whom the World's Self,[n] higher
even than the Self-Born Creator,
placed Itself to descend into Time and Space?

MĀTALI: Who else?

DUḤṢANTA (*prostrates himself fully at the feet of Mārīca and Aditi*): I, Duḥṣanta, ever Indra's servant, offer my homage with reverence.

MĀRĪCA: My son, may you live long to protect this Earth!

ADITI: My child, be invincible in battle!

ŚAKUNTALĀ: With my son, I bow at your feet.

MĀRĪCA: Dear daughter,

With a husband the equal of The Breaker of Dark Clouds;[p] 28
with a son the equal of his son, Jayanta,

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k. The Munificent One, Indra.
l. Brahmā (in the masculine)
m. Indra.
n. Brahma (in the neuter).
p. Indra visioned as the Storm-God; the Sanskrit epithet is 'ākhaṇḍala'.

what other blessing can fit you as this:
"Be as auspicious as Paulomī."[q]

ADITI : My child, may you be always honoured by your husband. May your little son of long years, be the pride and joy of your two families. Come, sit near us.

MĀRĪCA (*pointing to each in turn, addresses the king*):

Here, is Śakuntalā, the virtuous wife. 29
Here, your noble son. Here, Your Honour.
Faith, Promise, Performance: by Fortune's grace,
the three have happily come together.

DUḤṢANTA: Supreme Holiness! This favour granted us is indeed unprecedented — first comes the fulfillment of wishes, then the gracious seeing of Your Holiness. As a rule, on this earth, Your Holiness,

The flower appears first, then the fruit; 30
clouds gather before rain falls;
this is the law of cause and effect;
but to us, good fortune came first
preceding the seeing of you
and receiving of your grace.

MĀTALI: Long-lived Majesty! This is the way The Parents of the Universe bestow their blessings.

DUḤṢANTA: Supreme Holiness! I married your handmaid here in secret by the rites of mutual love. When her kinsfolk brought her to me after a period of time, I cruelly repudiated her because of an unfortunate lapse of memory. In acting this way, I have gravely wronged your kinsman, His Holiness, Kaṇva. Subsequently, on seeing this Ring, I realized that I had in truth married Śakuntalā. All of this strikes me as most strange;

Just as a man sees an elephant pass by 31
before his very eyes, but doubts its existence,
and then, noticing its footprints, ceases to doubt;
such are the changes that my mind has passed through.

MĀRĪCA: My son, you have reproached yourself sufficiently. The delusion that your mind was labouring under is quite natural. Listen to what I have to say.

q. Indra's Queen

DUḤṢANTA: I am all attention.

MĀRĪCA: The moment Menakā flew in from Apsarā Pool and came to Aditi, bearing Śakuntalā grief-stricken on account of her repudiation, I knew from meditating upon the events why it had happened this way. The unhappy girl, your partner in religious rites[r] had been spurned by you under the influence of Durvāsa's curse. I knew as well that the ill effects of his curse would cease to operate as soon as you saw this Ring.

DUḤṢANTA (*sighing with relief*): Then, I am free from blame.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*to herself*): I thank my good fortune. My lord did not really spurn me after all. He did so only because he had forgotten all about me....but, I have no recollection of having been cursed.....ever. Or...is it possible that being lost in thoughts about my husband and absent-minded on account of the separation from him.....I was oblivious of a curse? I wonder if that was why my friends asked me to be sure and present the Ring to my husband.

MĀRĪCA (*addressing Śakuntalā*): Dear child, you know all the facts now. Therefore, do not harbour any feelings of resentment towards your partner in all religious duties. Remember this:

You were spurned harshly by your lord 32
when the curse clouded his memory darkly.
Now the darkness has lifted;
sovereignty over him is yours.
Tarnished by grime the mirror's surface returns no image;
polished, its brightness reflects oneself.

DUḤṢANTA: It is as Your Holiness points out.

MĀRĪCA: My son, I trust that you have greeted your son born of Śakuntalā, with joy. I have myself performed his birth rite and all other sacraments.

DUḤṢANTA: Supreme Holiness, the enduring glory of my line rests with him.

MĀRĪCA: Yes, that shall be. O, King long-lived, know this: he, your son will be a Sovereign of the World. Know this too:

Crossing the oceans in a vehicle gliding smooth, 33
unopposed he shall conquer and rule
the rich Earth with her seven continents.
Named Sarvadamana here because by his strength

r. Dharma Patni

he subdues all creatures, in future he will be proclaimed Bharata—He Who Bears the World.

DUḤṢANTA: When your Divine Self has performed all the sacraments for him, all this and more may be expected of him.

ADITI: Divine Lord, should the venerable sage Kaṇva not be informed in detail of all the events that have led to the fulfillment of his daughter's hopes and wishes? Menakā, out of love for her daughter has been living here, attending on us and knows everything.

ŚAKUNTALĀ (*to herself*): Her Holiness has put in words the longings of my heart.

MĀRĪCA: By the divine vision acquired through penance everything that has happened is present to the eyes of His Reverence Kaṇva. (*on reflection*) Even so, it is our obligation to formally acquaint the sage with the happy turn of events. Ho there! Is anyone around?

Enter a disciple.

DISCIPLE: Supreme Holiness. Here I am.

MĀRĪCA: Gālava, my son, go by the Aerial Path to His Reverence Kaṇva immediately. Convey my joyful message to him that on the termination of the period of the Curse, Śakuntalā with her son has been duly received by Duḥṣanta whose memory is now restored.

DISCIPLE: Your command shall be carried out at once, Your Holiness. (*he leaves*)

MĀRĪCA (*to the king*): My son, you too should mount your friend Indra's chariot with your son and wife and return to your Capital.

DUḤṢANTA: The command of Your Holiness shall be obeyed.

MĀRĪCA:

May Indra pour the blessings of abundant rain 34
on your people.
In return you please Indra with oblations
offered in full measure in sacrifices.
Let Time run its round in this pattern
woven of acts of mutual service for ages.
May both worlds enjoy glory and plenitude
built on this enduring friendship.

DUḤṢANTA: For my part, Divine Lord, I shall strive to the best of my power to establish this blessed state.

MĀRĪCA: Is there any other blessing that I may bestow on you, my son?

DUḤṢANTA (*worships Mārīca with great joy*): If the Glorious Lord wishes to grant further favours to me, let them be these:

May kings work tirelessly for the good of the people. 35
May the utterance of those blessed by the Word
be ever honoured.
May the self-Existent lord who unites in Himself
the Dark and the Light,
whose Infinite Power pervades this Universe
annihilate the round of my births.

All exit.

End of Act Seven
Entitled
Śakuntalā's Prosperity

Thus Ends the Play
Entitled
The Recognition of Śakuntalā

Notes to the Introduction

1. The *Vāgsuktam* or *Hymn of the Word* is one of the great poems of *Origins* in the Vedas; in it *Vāc* or *Vāk*, the creative Word (also meaning speech, voice), announces herself (the word is in the feminine) and speaks in images that combine power and beauty, of bringing the universe into being and establishing communion between human and divine. *Vāc* is the *Śakti* or inherent power of the creator as envisioned in the *Ṛgveda.*
2. Anon: The Sanskrit word for the ring finger is *a-nāmikā* (the nameless).
3. Bāṇabhaṭṭa, lived and wrote in the seventh century CE.
4. Kumarila Bhatta, the philosopher, CE 590-650, quotes two lines from *Śakuntalā.* I:20 in his Tantra-vārtika; cited in Nandargikar's ed. of *Meghadūtam,* 1893, intro. p. 31.
5. The Aihole inscription CE 634 of Pulikesena II, the powerful Cālukyan monarch who ruled over what is now Maharashtra; the poet is here mentioned by name.
6. *AV.* 19:53, 54.
7. *Śiva* is the silence, quote from Saiva sacred texts; see Radhakrishnan I.P., vol. II, p. 727.
8. *Vāc* is later personified as Sarasvatī (flowing waters), goddess of wisdom and eloquence and the patron deity of the arts. In the Vedas, the *waters* are the infinitude of potentialities which is the origin of the universe; the space-ocean that forms the waters of creation.
9. 'The seers with wisdom searching within/discovered the bond of being in non-being', RV 10:129:4.
10. 'Let us in well-wrought songs proclaim the origin of the gods that may be seen when chanted in the ages to come', op. cit., 10:72:1.
11. 'I reveal the father at the World's highest peak' op.cit, 10:125:7.
12. *Kalpanā,* the poetic imagination, is the reflection of *Māyā,* the cosmic imagination; *māyā* derived from the root *ma,* 'to form, measure, display', is the shaping power of the Supreme.

13. The caves in the low hills near Bhilsa (Vidiśā) and on the way to Sanchi contain ancient rock-painting and sculptured reliefs.
14. The Gaṅgā was an important waterway with fleets of barges carrying merchandise up to Indraprastha (Delhi) which was the last ford.
15. *Rām:* Sundara Kāṇdam : canto 7.
16. *Harṣacaritam:* ch. 6. See p. 192 of trans. by Cowell and Thomas.
17. *Veda* is *lit.* wisdom; the Vedic texts are regarded as revelation.
18. *RV* 1:108
19. Op.cit 10: 95
20. Op.cit 10:125
21. Op.cit 7.86
22. Op.cit. 10:100: the refrain is: "For our boon we ask for felicity full and boundless", and in 10:134: "The blessed Mother gave you birth. The glorious Mother gave you birth."
23. D.D. Kosambi. *The Cuture and Civilization of Ancient India,* p. 199.
24. A.B. Keith. *The Sanskrit Drama,* pp. 36-7
25. *NS.* 1:44
26. Op.cit., 4:9,10
27. Op.cit. 4:13,14
28. Sūta in Sanskrit
29. Kuśī-lavas are bards, singers, actors.
30. These recitations have continued right to this day, performed in temples and village squares; the Sanskrit texts are explained in the vernaculars and the message expounded in simple language, often accompanied by music and dance; such recitals are called Harikathā or Kāthākālakṣepa. In Madhya Pradesh, the Pandavani is a re-telling by one or more persons with musical and drum accompaniments, of episodes from the Pandava story in the epic *Mbh.*
31. Indus Valley Civilization, circa 3,000 BC.; the figures are housed in the National Museum, Delhi.
32. Matthew Arnold writes in 'The Function of Criticism', p. 4 (Everyman's): "... for the creation of a master-work of literature, two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment".
33. *Bharata-nātya-Mañjarī.* G.K. Bhat, Intro., pp. Liii-liv and *NS.* 21: 76-80
34. The Woman-tree motif has a continuous history in Indian art and

literature; beginning with the Indus Valley goddess amid the leaves of a tree, through the art of Bharhut, Sanci, Mathura and the recently excavated Sanghol sculptures down to the dreaming Gyaraspur Vṛkṣikā (Gwalior Museum).

35. Rātri Sūkta, *RV.* 10:127.

36. Aranyānī Sūkta, op.cit., 10:146.

37. *RV.* 10:85.

38. Pṛthivī Sūkta, *AV* 12:I.

39. It is difficult to sustain an argument that nothing in the way of long poems was composed after the epic period, until we get to Aśvaghosa and Kālidāsa, but nothing has survived. A few stanzas from Pāṇinī's Jāmbavatī-Vijaya and solitary stanzas from the works of other poets have survived, chiefly as quotations in other works.

40. He, covering the Earth on all sides
dwells within, in ten fingers' space;
Puruṣa alone is all this:
What has been and what is to come:
The Lord of Immortality
and of that here which grows by food. (*RV* 10:90:2)
(Puruṣa is the Primal Being)

41. Umā (mother), Devī (shining one), Pārvatī (mountain-born), are all epithets given to Śakti, Śiva's inherent shaping power.

42. Ānandavardhana : *Dhvanyāloka,* I:8

43. *S.B.*: 13:5:4:15

44. Intro. translation of *Śakuntalā* by Laurence Binyon.

45. De and Dasgupta, *History of Sanskrit Literature,* p. 144.

46. Urvaśī, 3:19.

47. Harisvāmin.

48. The four *āśramas* or stages in a Hindu's life are :*Brahmacarya,* the student's when a young man gets instruction and is trained and equipped for a profession (and perhaps also apprenticed to some trade in other cases) *Gṛhastha,* the householder's when the man gets married, manages his career and gets children; *Vānaprastha,* retirement to the forest, a kind of retreat from an active life in the world; *sannyāsa,* total abandonment of the world. The second *āśrama* or stage of life, the householder's, is considered the most meritorious, because the person is in the world, doing good, helping others and generally sustaining society and the state.

Note to the Plays

Mālavikāgnimitram

1. Nāndi; the invocatory verse. The nāndi is the final part of the preliminary rituals, the pūrvaraṅga. In all the three plays of Kālidāsa, Śiva is invoked. This verse is framed in a series of contradictions. Behind these contradictions is the concept that opposites are resolved in Śiva.

   Line 1 : The tiger skin refers to the myth of the heretic sages who call up a demon in the form of a tusker that attacks Śiva. Śiva slays the demon (gajāsura) and peeling off the hide wraps it round his person.

   Line 4. The image refers to the two-in-one-godhead, half male, half female, Śiva-Śakti. It is the ardhanārī form of Śiva.

   Line 5. The reference is to Śiva, the yogi.

   Line 6. The eight forms are the five elements : Space, Air, Fire, Water, Earth, the two time keepers of the Cosmos, Sun and Moon, and the Priest. These are the eight manifest forms of Śiva that constitute the cosmos. He is the Pure Being beyond the manifest universe.
2. The signet ring of Queen Dhāriṇī with the figure of a serpent engraved on it, plays an important role in Act 4. It is introduced right at the opening of the play.
3. The tāndava danced by Rudra-Śiva and the lāsya by Umā are the two modes. Śiva dances the fierce, dynamic dance of creation (and destruction); Umā dances the gentle mode. In this verse, Śiva is the Dancer of both modes; the One is ungendered, undifferentiated.
4. Sattva, Rajas, Tamas : the three gunas or qualities are blended in all forms of being; Sattva is purity, goodness; Rajas is passion, the will necessary for all action; Tamas is darkness, ignorance.
5. The Sun passes on his splendour to the Fire at sunset.
6. The two Dhāriṇīs are the Queen and the Earth; the monarch is wedded to the Earth. The word is derived from the verb 'to bear support, sustain and nurture'.
7. Chalita (calita, chalika are other terms used for it) derived from the verb 'chal', to deceive, to dissemble, is a difficult number to perform.

It is a four-part sequence where the dancer expresses her own personal emotions as Mālavikā does (2.4) under the guise of depicting the emotions of a fictive person. One part of it is the declaration of love of a young girl deeply in love with a young and handsome man beyond her reach. Kauśikī's choice of this form is deliberate to enable Mālavikā to express her love for the king. The specific chalika in the play is said to be one composed by Śarmiṣṭhā. Perhaps some such number choreographing the Śarmiṣṭhā–Yayāti love story was current in the poet's time. But it has not survived. However, the story of Śarmiṣṭhā and Yayāti is a very old one (*Mbh.* 1.73–80, see glossary under Yayāti), known to all the characters in the play, especially to the intelligent and cultivated queens; and familiar to the audience.

8. The dohada rite is often mentioned in Sanskrit literature. It stems from a belief that trees also have longings during pregnancy (before they bloom). A young and beautiful girl by kicking it with her jewelled foot is believed to satisfy its longings and remove whatever is preventing the aśoka from blooming.

9. Red with anger.

10. Nāga-kanyā, similar to mermaids in European mythology. These semi-divine women were very beautiful of face and form; only their lower extremities ended in a fish's tail. With their feet tightly bound together, the two girls, Mālavikā and Bakulāvalikā would have appeared to have not had separate ankles and feet but something more like the tail of a fish.

11. The bull in the market place is a temple bull, honoured and well-fed that roams around everywhere as it pleases without let or hindrance. Or it might refer to a bull let loose as part of funeral rites, also pampered and allowed to roam around.

12. The reference is to Irāvatī walking around in a drunken state, unsteady, with weaving steps.

13. Indra, the god of storms and rain sends rain down to the earth; and he will do so whether frogs croak or not croak. The croaking of frogs does not bring rain; it is Indra's favour that causes rain to fall.

14. There is some word play in this short exchange of words between Irāvatī and Gautama. She sneers at Gautama for employing nīti in the sense of policy learnt from Kāmatantra (texts on love). He retorts saying that nīti (using it in the sense of ethics) finds no place in his thinking which barely has room for the gāyatrī mantra. The wordplay involves nīti in two senses; and tantra versus mantra.

15. The aśvamedha sacrifice is very important. A fine stallion bearing special marks of excellence on its body is let free to roam for a year over the territories that the suzerain claims as his own and under his control. The stallion is accompanied by a prince of the royal blood accompanied by a company of warriors. If the stallion is stopped by any monarch it means that the suzerainty of the owner of the stallion is being challenged. The warriors accompanying the stallion have to fight the challenger and protect the stallion. If they are successful, defeat the challenger and bring the horse back safely at the end of a year it proves the legitimacy of the suzerain's claim to control all the territories through which his stallion roamed free, unchallenged.

16. Varadā (Wardha) is a river in Vidarbha (Berar). There is wordplay in this verse. Vara-da is "Bestower of Boons". Varadā in the feminine is the river bestowing the blessings of prosperity and plentitude to the people living on her banks. Varada in the masculine refers to Agnimitra, the king who grants boons, gifts and services to his people, bringing them prosperity and plenitude by his just and wise governance as the ruler.

17. An ancient name for the Vidharbhas (modern Berar).

18. Sahakārī may mean a specially bred variety of mangoes, like the Alphonso of our own day and age.

19. Lakṣmī or Śrī, goddess of beauty, wealth, prosperity of all kinds and royal glory is shown in iconography as seated or standing on a lotus. The lotus is always associated with Lakṣmī.

20. When the sons of King Kṛtavirya destroyed all the descendants of their family priest, Bhṛgu, including children in the womb to recover the wealth they had given to him and his family, one woman hid her child in her thigh afraid to keep it in her womb. The child called Aurva (born from the thigh, ūru) threatened to destroy the persecutors of his family: but he was perouaded by his ancestors (Pitṛs) to cast his anger into the ocean where it was transformed into the subterranean fire (vadavāgni).

Vikramorvaśīyam

1. The invocatory verse is addressed to Śiva spoken of as The One (ekam) in the Vedas. The Word (*Vāk*), is also regarded in the Vedas as the source and creator of the universe (Rv. 10:125). *Akṣara* has two meanings : (1) imperishable (2) the letters of the alphabet. In Saiva mythology Śiva is not only the creator of the universe but of language as well. As He danced beating out the rhythms of creation, the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet beginning with *a* the first vowel right to the end with *ha* emerged from the beats of the drum in the Lord's hand. In this stanza, Śiva is perceived as both transcendent (line 2) and immanent (line 9), a fundamental tenet in Hindu thought. In line 12, Śiva is perceived as The Support of the Universe (sthāṇu), a term used in a great poem in the Atharvaveda, entitled *Skambha*, the pillar.

2. The preliminary rites that are performed before the play begins are called *rangapūrva*. The nāndi (invocatory verse) is the concluding part of these rites.

3. Even to this day the custom prevails of requesting elders and scholars in the audience to give the artist permission to commence a recital; the word used is *izāzat*.

4. This stanza is considered by some scholars/editors as unauthentic. I have included it because it sets the tone of the performance. Kālidāsa is aware of the power of music to rouse emotional responses and therefore to set the tone; to cite a few examples: the songs in *Śakuntalā*, (1.4) sung by the leading actress to introduce the nāyaka, Duḥṣanta; the lyric in the same play sung by the king's discarded queen, the once-beloved Hamsavatī (*Śak*: 5:8).

5. I have retained the use of the Sanskrit terms *Deva*, literally "the Luminous Ones" and *Dānava* for their foes, the sons of Danu.

6. The word literally means "lying in The Waters"; or "He whose abode is The Waters (nārah)", meaning the Waters of Creation. In the *Ṛgveda*, The One (tadekam) is spoken of as lying in The Waters (*Rv.* 10.129). Later the word is more or less exclusively employed for Viṣṇu; Nara is Man. In this context, Nārāyana is specifically given the epithet *narasakhā*, companion of Man, conveying the close relationship

of human and divine. Man and the godhead he relates himself to form an indissoluble unit, as in the compound word, *Nara-Nārāyaṇa.*

7. Vinatā was one of the eighteen daughters of Dakṣa Prajāpati; Kadru was another. All the eighteen sisters were married to Kaśyapa, a Primal Ancestor. Vinatā was the mother of all birds, chief among them being Garuḍa, the golden eagle, King of Birds, and vāhana (vehicle) of Viṣṇu. Kadru was the mother of all the serpents. There was no love lost between these two sisters who were co-wives and jealous of each other. Their children became ancient and hereditary enemies. (This explains the enmity of eagles and snakes).

8. Madhyaloka, the middle world in cosmography is the world of mortals. The cosmography formulates the concepts of the Triple World and Triple Time (Triloka and Trikāla). The three worlds are : the World of Light, Svarga; the world of man and nature, Earth; and the world below, Pātāla, where the great nāgas (snakes) live. It is perhaps useful to point out that Pātāla is not hell. Triple time is Past, Present and Future.

9. The word can be read two ways : (1) given by Soma, the Moon (2) the name of the king's chariot. In Sanskrit literature, chariots, bows, conches are all given specific names. Naming bestows identity says the Veda. The first meaning prominently brings out the divine lineage of the king, Purūrava (see Appendix I for the genealogy). The play frequently refers to Purūrava's descent from Soma, the Moon. He is the first emperor of the celebrated lunar dynasty in the king lists provided in Purāṇic literature.

10. An example of word play. Urvaśī wishes to know where, meaning the place where her friends were. The king to convey his own emotions for her takes it deliberately in the sense of not a place but a state of mind.

11. It has been suggested that Vikrama was another name for Purūrava.

12. There is a reference here to two myths, one Puranic, the other Vedic. For the Purāṇic, see Appendix II : Myths (2). But the older and original version is to be found in the Ṛgveda where the term Viṣṇu, All-Pervader, is an epithet of the Sun. The Sun takes three steps or strides in space, the first above the horizon at dawn, the second or 'middle stride' in the sky at noon and the third and last one again on the horizon at sunset.

13. Devacchanda is the term used for a necklace of pearls consisting of several strings in elaborate designs. We might surmise that Purūrava's

palace had some architectural features simulating such a design.

14. Nipuṇikā is making up these words which she attributes to the Queen. Her ploy is to make Māṇavaka reveal the king's secret.
15. The luminaries in space.
16. The day is divided into eight parts of an hour and a half each. Beginning at six in the morning this might refer to nine o' clock when the king can take a break. But the comparison to the sun (2.1.8) which is believed to stand still for a moment at high noon seems to make it more like twelve o' clock.
17. The five kinds of food are : what is chewed and eaten; what is swallowed without chewing; what is licked; what is sucked; and what is drunk.
18. The cātaka, the crested cuckoo, is believed to imbibe only raindrops, a few at a time, and not drink water found on the ground. It chooses a heavenly drink and the king similarly Urvaśī's celestial love.
19. The spring jasmine is Urvaśī; Kunda is another variety of jasmine, used here for the Queen. The Kunda blooms earlier and begins to dry up at the time the Mādhavī begins to bloom.
20. Love, Kāma has five flower arrows : the lotus, ásoka, śirīṣa, mango and white lily. The seeing of these flowers and inhaling their fragrance is believed to arouse love and sexual passion. This is one of the poetic conventions employed in Sanskrit literature.
21. Ahalyā (literally un-ploughed or un-husbanded) was raped (or seduced) by Indra who was infatuated by her beauty. She was the wife of the sage Gautama who discovered what had happened in his absence and cursed them both; Indra to have his whole body covered by female genitalia, later changed to eyes and Ahalyā to turn into stone.
22. As a messenger, a go-between.
23. "Invincible". The magical incantation signified by this name makes the user invincible and secure from enemies. Tiraskariṇī, used a few lines later confers invisibility on the user.
24. Causing the death of Purūrava, Love's victim. Death is the last stage in the progress of unfulfilled love. (*NS*).
25. The flower of paradise, sometimes identified as the rhododendron.
26. The epithet used here for Kāma (Love) is Smara, from the root '*smṛ*, to remember, to recollect'. Love feeds on memories and is sustained by them.

27. Dikpālas, protectors of space in all directions : Indra is the foremost of them.

28. *Rasa* is not a word that is easily translatable. The literal meanings are 'taste, flavour'. It could be understood as the total response to a work of art of a person of taste and sensibility; the response created by the proper blend of sight, sound, words, images and so on. Eight rasas are mentioned; a ninth one, *śānta*, was added later.

Sṛṇgāra	-	the erotic.
Vīra	-	the heroic.
Hāsya	-	the comic.
Bhayānaka	-	the fearful and terrifying.
Bībhatsa	-	the contemptible and disgusting.
Raudra	-	the furious.
Adbhuta	-	the marvellous
Karuṇa	-	the compassionate

(Śānta, the ninth, the serene, and peaceful).

29. Añjanā was an apsarā cursed to become a monkey. She was very beautiful and one day Vāyu (The Wind God) blew her robe up and became infatuated with her beauty. Vāyu pleaded earnestly for her love and was successful in his suit. Hanumān was the son born of this union.

30. It appears that one or other of the pupils of great sages accompanied him carrying the sage's own special seat which might have been of deer skin or tiger skin, to sit on.

31. This play might have been current at some time, perhaps even in Kālidāsa's time. But it has not survived. The source of the play is in the myth of the Churning of the Ocean (see Appendix II).

32. In the Beginning mountains were winged and flew around causing confusion and havoc. Indra clipped their wings and rooted them in the earth. The image conveys the majesty of the king, not his size.

33. Rohiṇī, "The Red Star", Aldebaran. In mythology, the Moon (Chandra) is the Lord of Stars. The twenty seven constellations (lunar mansions) are his wives, Rohiṇī being his favourite consort. The Moon moves through space staying a day (a little more than twenty four hours) in each lunar mansion completing his journey in the twenty nine days that make up a lunar month. Purūrava's lunar ancestry is referred to here.

34. The new moon consisting of one digit only is perceived as entering the sun; the moon's light is borrowed light, that is, it is the reflected

light of the Sun. On the day of the new moon (amāvāsya) certain important religious rites, as for instance the remembrance of ancestors and offering of oblations to them are done. The moon is believed to contain amrta (ambrosia) which is drunk by Devas and Pitṛs. Amrta sustains them and confers immortality. Therefore, the moon wanes and waxes as it is replenished.

35. The abhisārikā is an amorous woman who of her own free will goes at night to meet her lover, dressed in deep blue the colour of the midnight sky and wearing few jewels so as not to attract attention.

36. A sweet dish made of curds mixed with sugar and spices such as culinary camphor, cardamom, saffron.

37. The bare minimum of adornment that a married woman has to wear to ensure her husband's wellbeing and indicate her own good fortune; the fact that she is not widowed and destitute.

38. The vidūṣaka has the king's happiness in mind, not the Queen's. The "fruit" in this passage refers to the fulfillment of Purūrava's union with Urvaśī.

39. Kumāra is the self-begotten son, in metaphysical terms the emanation of Śiva; he appears to have been perceived as celibate. "Kumāra" signifies a boy; and in Purāṇic mythology Kumāra is said to have Devasenā (The Army of the Devas) as his consort. He is a wargod wedded to his mission.

40. There are five trees of paradise mentioned. Where it is the Mandāra that is meant, the term is commonly translated as the Indian Coral Tree. Identification of trees in Sanskrit is not always correct; at best they are often educated guesses.

41. The stage direction at this point is as follows : After this recitative, a bhinnaka. The recitative refers to v.12.

42. The sheldrake or Brahminy duck, the conventional symbol and motif of love-in-separation, because the pair of birds keep calling to each other at night from opposite sides of a lake, grieving that they are parted. Actually they are foraging at different parts of the lake and keeping in touch by calling to indicate their location to each other. They are two-toned in coloration, mustard and rust and when they are swimming their bodies appear to be wheel-shaped (cakra-vāka).

43. The attendants of the king are obviously many; but the *kirāti* figures prominently. She looks after the king's weapons, specially his bow and quiver of arrows with the wrist-guard. Therefore she is a special

attendant, a trusted one who would be armed herself: a special bodyguard. Kirātas (Kirāti is the feminine) are members of some hill tribe. One version of the play specifically mentions the following as comprising the king's attendants: the sūta (charioteer), the kancukī (chamberlain) and the armed kirātī.

44. This observation of Urvaśī's seems inappropriate like a few others that she makes in Act 2. To whom does the term "all" apply? The words are precisely the same as the words spoken by Dhāriṇī (*Mal.* 5.17.+20). However, the context there is different. It appears to this critic that the dramatist deliberately gives these inappropriate observations to Urvaśī from time to time. Another instance is to be found in 3.16.+5 where Urvaśī remarks to Citralekhā that she is not forward, presumptuous, but that she accepts the king's offer to sit next to him on the same seat like his queen only because the Queen Consort, Auśīnarī has given him (the king) to her.

The following definitions and explanatory notes wherever possible for the technical terms for song, gait and dance used in Act Four are given in the order they occur in the Sahitya Akademi edition of the play, edited by Velankar.

Prāvésikī Ākṣiptikā: An introductory song, sung or recited before the actual entry on state of the character/s. It is also suggestive of the emotional state of the character about to enter. The commentator Ranganatha defines these songs as preceding the actor/s as they enter dancing and clapping their hands. This entrance song (1) has the image of a lake of lotuses with a pair of wild geese (hamsa) that stands for Citralekhā and Sahajanyā. The second entrance song (5) represents the king as a tusker.

Jambhalika: A repeat of a previous verse with slight changes in the wording.

Khaṇḍadhārā (also Khaṇḍikā): Possibly an exit song in a specific metre (Prakrit has its own set of metres). The term may refer to a metre as well as songs composed in that metre.

Dvipadī/Dvipadikā: This is taken generally to indicate a certain gait (gati): a certain way of covering the space on the stage which is not natural but stylized. It can be seen in our own day and age on stage in Bharata Natyam. It is not walking, but stepping with deliberate steps. This particular term as well as the one following, namely carcarī (and carcarikā) are the ones used most in Act Four.

Carcarī: The most important song/dance used in Act Four of this play. Kale defines it as a song, *gīti*; a passionate lyric sung by an actress in low, middle and high pitch. Velankar defines it as a gati, like the dvipadī. The

definitions of the terms for song/dance in Act Four of *Vikramorvāsīyam* are not as clear and precise as we would wish. And there are differences of opinion as well. The carcarīs give expression in music and dance to the emotional turmoil of the king. The carcarī is also regarded as a group dance (with choral accompaniment perhaps, but we are not sure of this). It could be like a *rās* according to some scholars; a circle of pairs, weaving in and out to make intricate patterns. The king takes part in dancing some of the carcarīs.

Pāṭha : Recitative.

Bhinnaka: A kind of rāga according to Ranganatha. Velankar understands bhinnaka to be a kind of metre.

Khuraka : a dance performed to the accompaniment of five cymbals; the melody is sung in two tempos, medium and fast.

Kuṭilikā: Velankar suggests that it is a dance made up difficult crooked movements (perhaps weaving different patterns of movements).

Mallaghati/Kakubha: These may have been danced without any melodic accompaniment. I might suggest that the first probably used "ghaṭa", earthen pots as drums. We still have the "ghaṭa", an earthen pot used in Carnatic music. The Kakubha defined as done in six different ways might mean that they were done facing a different direction each time; the four cardinal points, the zenith and the nadir.

It appears to this critic that most of these dances with or without their melodic accompaniments probably come out of a background of folk songs and folk dances. The clapping of hands is still done in Tamil Nadu and it is known as *kummi;* when it is danced with a pair of short sticks it is known as *kolāṭṭam.* And these two dances are definitely folk dances and the forms they take are circular.

Abhijnānaśākuntalam

1. Bard or rhapsode, also charioteer to the king; originally one of the seven persons (or five) in a kingdom who were closely associated with the choice and consecration of a king. For this reason, I have retained the Sanskrit word *Sūta* instead of charioteer. *Sūtas* were honoured persons; the most celebrated of charioteers in literature is Kṛṣṇa, who in the epic *Mahābhārata*, drives Arjuna's chariot and preaches the *Gītā* on the battle-field.
2. The blackbuck is a very sacred animal; there is a close relationship in the play between Śakuntalā and the blackbuck; Śakuntalā's purity and gentleness as well as her delicate beauty are suggested.
3. Pinākī is one of the many epithets given to Śiva. He is the holder (and wielder) of the *pināka*, the bow that destroys evil and ignorance; the *pināka* also signifies Time. There are two Puranic stories about Pinākī (Śiva) and the deer. The first story of Dakṣa's sacrifice (see Appendix II : Myths); the second story of Brahmā's incestuous love for his own daughter who fled from his advances changing herself into a deer. Śiva outraged, shot an arrow into Brahmā who had changed himself into an antelope to chase his daughter. The antelope was changed into the constellation Mṛgaśiras; mṛga is deer, śiras is the head (deer's head).
4. The lunar dynasty. Puru was its most distinguished monarch, possessing extraordinary virtues such as filial devotion, nobility, generosity and so on. He was the son of Yayāti and out of filial affection for his old father who begged for the son's youth and strength, Puru agreed and took on his father, Yayāti's decrepitude. After enjoying the many pleasures of borrowed youth, Yayāti restored to his son Puru the youth, strength and virility that he had lent his father. In gratitude, Yayāti gave his whole, vast empire to Puru, excluding his other four sons who had refused to help him.
5. Solar associations are present in this image; the chariot wheels of a universal monarch, *cakra-vartī*, roll over the whole earth (the known world) just as the sun's wheel (the solar disc) rolls through space. The wheel is also associated with Buddha, who turned the wheel of spiritual empire.

6. A significant phrase; Śakuntalā is pictured as a goddess of the woodland. For her associations with sylvan goddesses like yakṣis and guardians of sacred pools, see intro., section ix, pages 37-39.
7. Throbbing of the right arm in a man indicates good fortune as for instance, the prospect of meeting a beautiful woman and love and marriage. Throbbing of the right eye or arm is a good omen in a man and of the left in a woman.
8. According to Manu a man should marry in his own class or below it; a woman in her own or in a class above her. If Śakuntalā's parents were both of the Brahmin class, then she was hierarchically above the King who was a Kṣatriya (class of warriors and rulers). This is against the Law, not permitted in the case of a king. If her mother were not Brahmin, i.e. of the same class as the sage Kaṇva, she would not be a pure-bred Brahmin girl and the King could marry her. As it happens her real father was a Kṣatriya and hence named a royal sage, as Duḥṣanta himself is in Act 2.
9. According to Manu concealing one's true identity is reprehensible; on the other hand kings and high state officials often went around incognito to see for themselves how things were in the kingdom.
10. The 'companions' are a picked band of warriors, princes or nobles who protected the monarch by surrounding his war chariot as they went into battle.
11. Misfortunes do not come singly.
12. The Sanskrit word *kubja* stands for a hunchback as well as an aquatic plant that bends and waves buffeted by the force of the current.
13. Hunting is one of the four most pernicious vices of the ten that kings are warned against, the other three being : drink, whoring and dicing.
14. A kind of crystal believed to glow and even catch fire when struck by the sun's rays.
15. A sixth of all kinds of income and produce was paid into the treasury as tax.
16. Sages inspired reverence as repositories of holiness, but they were also easy of approach (Durvāsa is an exception to the rule).
17. 'The Concealer' – the demon of drought or darkness.
18. See no. 10. The *cakra-rakṣī* is used for those warriors who rode by the side of the King's war-chariot; lit., 'protectors of the wheels'.
19. A king who wished to go to heaven bodily and decided to perform

sacrifices to ensure this. Viśvāmitra (Śakuntalā's real father) undertook to officiate at these sacrifices, at the end of which Triśaṅku began to make his bodily ascent to heaven; the gods pushed him down and Viśvāmitra pushed him up with the result that Triśaṅku hung suspended in space between heaven and earth.

20. A prelude provides information about events not presented on the stage; a prelude may be brief like this one or long like the one in Act 4, where a number of events that have taken place over a length of time are recounted.

21. Kāma who had the temerity to tempt the great yogi, Śiva immersed in deep meditation, and make the Lord fall in love with Umā, was burnt to ashes by the spark of fury from Śiva's third eye. Kālidāsa tells of this important happening in The Beginning, in his long narrative poem *Kumārasambhavam* (Canto 3).

22. Love; like the Greek Eros, the Indian god of love, Kāma, is associated with dolphins.

23. *Lāvanya* is the Sanskrit word signifying an ethereal kind of loveliness.

24. Since she refers a few lines earlier to a song, Śakuntalā may at this point sing rather than speak these lines.

25. The king refers to his descent from the moon.

26. The secluded and well-guarded part of the palace which formed the residence of the queens.

27. The use of the word "friend" indicates the change in the relationship of Śakuntalā's two friends to the king. It is no longer one of formal courtesy.

28. A king who is the paramount sovereign is said to be wedded to the earth. The word Vasumatī used in this verse (23) refers to the Earth, The Bearer of Riches as well as to Duḥṣanta's Queen Consort whose name is Vasumatī. (Vasu=Riches, Wealth, Plenitude). Duḥṣanta is guilty of telling a white lie.

29. Double meaning indicated here: (i) Śakuntalā is thinking of parental consent; (ii) she considers it disrespectful to place her feet on the lap of the king whom she has chosen as husband.

30. This is an ambiguous statement by Śakuntalā. She is not mistress of herself; she is dependent on parental consent. She cannot choose her husband of her own will. That she is not mistress of her own feelings might mean that she, a girl brought up in a Hermitage (āśrama) has fallen desperately in love with a total stranger; and that

perhaps makes her feel insecure about Duḥṣanta. There is an undertone of suspicion and fear in Śakuntalā's mind right through Act 3. Will she end up not as queen but a concubine? There is a hint of premonition in these lines.

31. The word *Kumārī* means a very young girl, one in her pre-teens, and also a virgin; in the context the second meaning is more appropriate.

32. Manu accepts Gandharva marriage as one of the legitimate forms of marriage. The Gandharva Rite is marriage by mutual consent out of spontaneous love without the consent or even knowledge of the family. It is secretly done. But it is legal though it is not sacramental performed in the presence of family and friends with the Holy Fire (Agni) as witness. It carrics with it all the rights as well as the responsibilities of a sacramental marriage.

33. The off-stage voice is that of one of Śakuntalā's friends, Anasūyā or Priyamvadā who are on the look out to warn the king and their friend against possible intrusions. Gautamī is on her way to check on Śakuntalā's state of health and her friends are warning her.

34. The prayers were accepted by the deity (or oracle).

35. The eldest son of the Chief Queen becomes the Heir Apparent.

36. These are two upper garments, one probably a veil and the other a kind of mantle.

37. This verse is reminiscent of a very celebrated one in the Vedas: *Madhuvālā ṛtāyate...*'.

38. Kaṇva's message is subtly-worded; the king is expected to behave in a manner worthy of his noble lineage and keep his promises to Śakuntalā. He was chosen by her (by the Gandarva rite), giving him her love freely without any pressure from family and friends. The king has also esteemed the sage Kaṇva highly to contemplate marriage with his daughter. Finally, he, Kaṇva is rich not in material goods as Duḥṣanta is, but in holiness and self-restraint–a veiled reminder of the sage's 'holy power'.

39. St. 23 has an air of finality in closing the gate of the 'green world' to Śakuntalā; her return is placed in the distant future, when she and the king might return to the Hermitage in their last days, entering *vānaprastha,* 'retreat from the world', the third stage in a Hindu's life.

40. Śeṣa, the Great Serpent that is believed to hold the earth up on its hood.

41. The old-fashioned umbrella, a cumbrous contraption with a long and heavy handle, is meant. It is carried by servants who held them over princes, nobles, the wealthy and whoever could afford a servant to perform this service.

42. The Sanskrit word for a spray of flowers is *mañjarī*, in the feminine; hence the feminine pronoun in the next line, which refers to the singer Hamsavatī whom the king has loved and left; it also suggests the king's love for another, Śakuntalā, already forgotten.

The lotus is described as *vasati-mātram*, a one-night halt or mere stay overnight. In the Devanagari recension, the King's reply to Māḍhavya's query reads differently – 'She taunts me with spending all my time with Queen Vasumatī...' implying that the King's interest in the crowned queen is in the nature of an enforced overnight stop.

43. A king's conduct affects the well-being of his kingdom; the reverse is also true, that the King bears responsibility for offences committed in his kingdom because he is the ruler and has to keep order.

44. These are formal greetings; it is important that the penances of sages should prosper and that a king needs all the good fortune he can get for he carries his life on the point of his sword.

45. *Rājanīti* or realpolitik; statecraft.

46. The section of Act 6 beginning with the entrance of Caturikā with Śakuntalā's portrait and ending with the king swooning is interesting for a couple of insights; and also important. Up to the receipt of the letter about the shipwreck and death of a wealthy merchant who was childless, this passage is a re-enactment of the events of Act I – the initial meeting of the king and Śakuntalā. Duḥṣanta seems almost to relive these events in an attempt to *will* a change in their course and outcome and wipe off the repudiation of his wife from his mind, until the comment of Māḍhavya who has no use for illusions makes it impossible for him to do so. The re-enactment that Duḥṣanta attempts is also part of the process of penitence that leads to the restoration of wife and son. Recognising the sorrow of childlessness and the danger to the kingdom and the dynasty left without an heir, Duḥṣanta swoons. And when he regains consciousness he is a new and better man and a better king.

47. The rite performed early in pregnancy to ensure the birth of a male child.

48. I have translated the word here as missile for this reason: a certain class of weapons, arrows, discus, etc. were released after a charm or

invocation was pronounced over it directing it to a specific target. Similarly, another charm or sacred word was spoken to recall it; for this I have used the term 'de-activate'.

49. The ethereal regions above the earth are divided into seven spheres each with a specific wind coursing through it. The wind *pravaha* courses through the second sphere, the path of the sun. (The first is the atmosphere just above the earth).

Appendix I

KĀLIDĀSA'S DATES

To date old texts and ancient writers always poses several problems and in the case of a writer as reticent about himself and his work as Kālidāsa it is not possible to provide accurate and definite dates with the scanty facts we possess at this time. To say that the upper limit might be placed at CE 473, the date of the Mandasor inscription by one Vatsabhūti which reveals some indebtedness to Kālidāsa's poem *Ṛtusaṁhāram* (The Seasons) and the lower limit a few centuries lower than that date, is not very helpful.

To speak of a sense of the poet's writings in general as pointing to a particular period in Indian history, viz. the Gupta period, or to a particular king's reign, Chandra Gupta II (CE 375-414) is by no means proof of conclusive evidence. Franklin Edgerton[1] makes a very valid point about the subjectivity underlying such conclusions. We cannot say with any certainty that the opulence and splendour or the peace and prosperity of the Gupta period is reflected in Kālidāsa's work. The manner in which a writer's work relates itself to its age and times is complex. The ominous shadow of the French Revolution with its consequences writ large in history hardly falls on the pages of Jane Austen's novels. Kālidāsa's plays and poems move in many worlds – mythic, epic and historic. Do the descriptions of Alakā reflect the splendour of cities – Ujjayinī, Vidiśā, Pātalīputra – of the Gupta period, or of an earlier period? Are they in part allusive of epic descriptions of the splendours of Indraprastha, Ayodhyā and Lankā? Raghu's 'conquest of the quarters' (*digvijaya*)) may or may not be inspired by Samudra Gupta's similar conquest in the early fourth century CE, but the conquests of the Pandava brothers as detailed in the *Mahābhārata* are certainly part of the literary consciousness of the poet's epic, *Raghuvaṁśam* ((Raghu's Dynasty).

Tradition holds that Kālidāsa was the court-poet of Vikramāditya who ruled at Ujjain; a king who was a great conqueror and hero, a munificent patron of the arts, learned, wise and accomplished; a king who embodied the ideal of kingship in himself; who drove the invading Sakas out of Malwa presumably and established the Vikrama or Samvat (still used) in 57 BCE to commemorate his victory. Story-cycles have gathered round his name and fame : the *Vetālapañcaviṁśati* (Twenty-five Tales of the Genie), *Vikramāditya-Carita* (Life and Stories of Vikramāditya). Such story-cycles centre round the name of many ancient kings such as Emperor Asoka and

Udayana, King of the Vatsas, who ruled at Kauśāmbi during the time of Gautama Buddha in the sixth century BCE. We find a reference to the Udayana-tales in *Meghadūtam* (32). None has been as popular and widespread in the country as the Vikramāditya stories. But historicity has been denied to *this* Vikramāditya by some scholars who relegate him to the realm of legend and romance.[2]

The name, Vikramāditya which appears to have been the personal name of an ancient king, legendary or historic, occurs frequently in history. Three kings of that name ruled at Ujjayinī at various times; one of the most famous was Yasodharman of Malwa who defeated the Huns in the sixth century CE. Some rulers assumed the name Vikramāditya, meaning The Sun of Valour, as a title representative of their heroic exploits and achievements as rulers, the most celebrated of these in history being Chandra Gupta II. Other great rulers have been identified with the Vikramāditya of tradition, such as Gautamīputra Śatakarṇī (first century CE) the greatest of the Śātavāhana emperors, who is recorded as being a very handsome man, a great conqueror and a just and compassionate ruler, the qualities attributed to the traditional Vikramāditya. But this identification has also been disputed. The question is to determine which of the many Vikramādityas that history parades was the patron of Kālidāsa. Who is the real Vikramāditya?

Western Sanskritists after Sir William Jones and beginning with A.B. Keith, favour the identification of the Gupta emperor, Chandra Gupta II, as the Vikramāditya, patron of Kālidāsa, and place the poet accordingly in the fourth-fifth century CE. But this is open to challenge.

Kālidāsa's patron is identified by some scholars[3] as King Vikramāditya, son of Mahendrāditya of the Pāramāra dynasty ruling at Ujjain in the first millennium BCE. This dynasty belonged to the Malwas, mentioned in history as one of the clans following a republican form of government. It has also been suggested that the description in Kālidāsa's long poem, *Kumārasambhavam*, of the *asura* Tāraka and his evil forces, is a veiled reference[4] to the invading Sakas[5] who were then in occupation of Sind and were pushing into Malwa. This would be at the close of the first millennium BCE and accord with the first century BCE dating for the poet, and of his association with the Vikramāditya who defeated the Sakas.

Another veiled reference in the epic, *Raghuvaṁśam*, is seen as evidence of a first century BCE date for the poet. Devabhūti, the last of the Śuṅga emperors, who was a weak and dissolute monarch was assassinated in his bed in the dark by a slave girl dressed as his queen; he is taken as the

model for Agnivarṇa, the last of the rulers with whom Raghu's dynasty came to an ignoble end. He was also a weak, self-indulgent and dissolute monarch as Kālidāsa portrays him in the last canto of the epic; and he also seems to have died in suspicious circumstances though the epic itself speaks of a wasting disease as the cause of his death.[6] This dating places Kālidāsa at the close of the first millennium BCE; Devabhūti ascended the throne in 82 BCE and was assassinated in 72 BCE on the orders of his minister Vāsudeva[7] who proclaimed himself emperor establishing the Kāṇva dynasty.

One of the three dates put forward for Kālidāsa places the poet in the second century BCE during the period of the Śuṅga Empire (182–72 BCE) and makes him the court-poet of Agnimitra Śuṅga, son of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga, the emperor, ruling at Pātalīputra, the ancient capital of the northern empires of India. Agnimitra was his father's viceroy for the western part of the empire ruling with the title of Maharaja at Ujjayinī which had been the second and western capital from Mauryan times. Kālidāsa's first play *Mālavikāgnimitram* is about this monarch and has for its theme the romance between him and Mālavikā, princess of Vidarbha (Berar). Certain historical events that are referred to in the play relate to the two main power struggles of the period: the conflict in the north-west with the Bactrian Greeks and the struggle for control against the expanding power of the Śātavāhana empire in the south. In the last act of the play certain interesting facts are contained in a letter from the emperor to his son Agnimitra that might have some bearing on the problem of Kālidāsa's dates. Puṣyamitra refers to himself in the letter as Senāpati (Commander-in-chief) writing from 'within the sacred enclosure of the Sacrifice (*Rājasūya Yajña*), already consecrated for its performance' and invites his son and daughter-in-law to the ceremony requesting them to 'attend without delay', and 'setting aside all feelings of anger' (*vigata-roṣa-cetasah*). Now, this is a curious phrase that indicates that relations were somewhat strained between the emperor and his son. We know from Śuṅga coins unearthed in this century, that the Śuṅga emperors used their hereditary title of Senāpati or Senānī even though Puṣyamitra had performed two Horse-Sacrifices to legitimise and signify his accession to the throne at Pātalīputra after he had assassinated the last Mauryan emperor in public. The Śuṅgas had been hereditary Commanders-in-chief of the Imperial Mauryan armies. It is somewhat extraordinary that a poet who lived and wrote more than 500 years after the events referred to here, which would be the case if Kālidāsa were to be placed in the fourth-fifth century CE as many Western and some Indian Sanskritists do, should refer to the small details contained in the letter, particularly to the fact of strained relations between Agnimitra and his

father. As Indians of the past are alleged to be sadly lacking in the historical sense (in the Western sense of the term) this would be even more extraordinary. The letter itself is not structurally important in the play, *Mālavikāgnimitram*; it serves to glorify the future emperor, Vasumitra, 'the mighty bowman', son of Agnimitra who had defeated the Greek cavalry that had captured the sacred horse on the banks of the river Sindhu after bitter fighting and brought back that 'king of horses' to his grandfather. Vasumitra is glorified in the passage by a comparison to Aṁśumat, a mythic hero who had also released the sacrificial horse of his grandfather, Sagara, from captivity and brought it back to the sacrificial enclosure. A fallout of Vasumitra's bravery in his fierce encounter with invading Bactrian Greeks is that his mother, Queen Dhārinī, is assured of her position as Chief Queen, even though Mālavikā had taken the king's affections away from her. The introduction of the letter into the play therefore seems to suggest a reference to events that were either contemporaneous with the dramatist or within living memory.

Considering these facts, namely the letter in the last act of the play, *Mālavikāgnimitram*; the striking resemblance between the events in the life and death of Agnivarṇa in the poet's epic poem and the last Śuṅga emperor, Devabhūti; and the veiled references to the Sakas that are perceived in canto 2 of *Kumārasambhavam*, where the Immortals pray for deliverance from the atrocities of the *asura* Tāraka, it is plausible to argue that Kālidāsa lived and wrote either at the close or the middle of the first century BCE.

Claims have been made that the feel and tone of Gupta art of the fourth–fifth centuries CE indicate that it was contemporaneous with the great poet and dramatist. A strong case can be equally made out that the flowering in stone of the art of the Śuṅga-Śātavāhana period (second century BCE to second century CE) reflects the flowering in the verbal arts (Kālidāsa's poetry). The great friezes of Bharhut and Sanci and the carvings on the great gateways of the *stupa* in the latter reveal that same juxtaposition of the natural and human worlds seen in Kālidāsa's poetry, rendered in loving detail and exactitude, but stylized (Sanci - North Gate, lowest beam).[8] In Bharhut and Sanci and in the very recently unearthed Sanghol sculptures in red sandstone belonging to the Mathura School, are carved yakṣis and vṛkṣikās (tree-nymphs) standing under flowering trees and vines, embracing them, leaning against them, clasping flowering sprays, kicking a tree with the left foot[9] ornamented with anklets or holding a wine cup in one hand. We see a beautiful example of the former motif in the figure of the yakṣi (unfortunately mutilated) that adorns the East Gate bracket at Sanci; she seems to be swinging gracefully in space, kicking the tree (probably an

aśoka) with her left foot loaded with anklets and clasping a flowering spray with her left hand while the right is turned around another blossoming branch hanging down.[10] This sculptured beauty reminds us of the beloved in *Meghadutam* (74) standing next to the Mandāra tree she had nurtured and whose clusters of blossoms 'bend ... within reach of her hand', like a son bowing in respect to a mother and offering her flowers as a gift. The motif referred to, of lovely women holding a wine cup in their hands, perhaps to sprinkle the *kesara* tree with the wine from their mouths to make it bloom (again the *dohada*-idea, also referred to in the poem, st. 77) is sculpted in the Sanghol figures. A flowering in stone depicting the teeming energies of nature delineated and placed side by side with curving voluptuous figures of women with swelling breasts (a symbol of the maternal) and a smile and inscrutable look on their faces that seem to convey their awareness of their own youth, beauty and power to enchant men, can be perceived as paralleling the flowering in verse of that age. Kālidāsa often uses the word '*pramadā*' to convey this self-conscious feeling of young women exulting in their youth and beauty. The yakṣis and devatās of Bharhut, the Mathura yakṣī[11] and the Sanghol Figures[12] (also belonging to the Mathura School, though found near Chandigarh) are all *pramadās* with that same inscrutable smile and look as if all lit within with happiness (*Ṛtu*: 3:20); lovely women aware of and exulting in their own youth and beauty. A close-up of one of these lovely yakṣīs,[13] is that of Cūlakoka. She displays intricate patterns drawn with sandal paste on her cheeks (cf. *Ṛtu*: 6:7). In the Sanghol group we also find a depiction of young women intent on looking at themselves in a mirror and adorning themselves (*Ṛtu*: 4: 13-16) and consciously exulting in their husbands' love for them. A yakṣa-yakṣī couple[14] seated in a rocky niche (she is seated on his lap) and a deer? on one side are chiselled behind a pair of jugate peacocks, a melting tenderness in their faces as if lost in love for each other. A definite feeling of kinship is seen here of the arts; needless to say, that conclusions of this nature can only be drawn tentatively; we have, as already noted, no definite proof of the poet's dates.

In the final analysis, Kālidāsa's 'dates' are perhaps not that important. Fixing them might bring the satisfaction that solving a mathematical problem which has teased one into deep thought does; but does it add at all to the understanding of the poet's consummate art or enhance in any way the appreciation of his poetry that we should vex our minds with this problem, when the time and thought spent on it could be more profitably used in exploring the complexities of his works? The poet himself has chosen not to reveal anything about his life and work. So we might as well leave it at that.

Names and dates in ancient Indian history can be bewildering; the following note and table should be of some help.

Of the sixteen great kingdoms (*mahā-janapadas*) mentioned in the epic, Magadha with its capital at Rājagṛha very close to the later capital of Pātalīputra, (Patna), emerged as the most powerful around 600 BCE. The sixth century BCE is very important in ancient history, politically and culturally, because it saw not only the rise of Magadha (Bihar) as a power well on its way to becoming an empire, but also the rise of Jainism and Buddhism founded by Mahāvīra and Gautama Buddha as rival religions and systems of thought to Vedic Brahmanism. The empire under Chandragupta Maurya (325-298 BCE) and his grandson Asoka the Great (273-236 BCE) included almost all of India excepting the deep south, and extended into Afghanistan and beyond. The capital of the northern empire was at Pātalīputra and later at Ujjayinī; Chandra Gupta II is mentioned as having shifted his capital from Ujjayinī to Ayodhyā which was more central. But there seemed to have always been four capitals to facilitate the administration of a far-flung empire, with princes of the royal blood in charge. Ujjayinī may have been the western capital from very early times. (Aśoka the Great is mentioned in history as having been the viceroy at Vidiśā, not far from Ujjayanī).

In the south the Śātavāhana rulers who are believed to have originated in Maharashtra (some historians think that they belonged to Andhra-desa and that they are the Andhras mentioned in late Vedic texts prior to 600 BCE), with their capital at Pratiṣṭhāna (near Aurangabad) gradually spread east consolidating their power in the peninsula, excepting the traditional Chola-country in the deep south. Their kingdom grew into an empire (third century BCE — third century CE).

The two powers, as was inevitable, met and clashed along the River Narmadā (Kālidāsa's Revā) and the encounter of their armies is referred to in Kālidāsa's *Mālavikāgnimitram* (Act 5).

We can see that the descriptive phrase that Kālidāsa uses with reference to his heroes, 'rulers of the earth' (the world known to the ancients) ' from sea to sea' i.e. the eastern and western oceans bounding India may apply equally to the Śuṅga, Śātavāhana and Gupta emperors. The mythic rulers in his plays, Purūrava and Duṣyanta (Duḥṣanta) actually ruled over a very small part of the country between the rivers Sindhu (Indus) and Sarasvatī-Drsadvatī, celebrated in the *Ṛgveda*. Hastināpura across the river from Delhi was founded by Hasti, the king descended from Bharata, son of Duḥṣanta. The line of descent in the lunar dynasty is as follows:

Soma (Moon)

Budha (Mercury)

Ilā

Purūrava

Āyus

Yayāti m Śarmiṣṭhā

Puru

Duṣyanta m Śakuntalā

Bharata

Dates of Imperial Dynasties, fourth century BCE to third century CE (as having some bearing on Kalidasa's dates).

Mauryan Empire – founded by Chandragupta Maurya contemporary of Alexander of Macedon.

Chandragupta 324-321 BCE

Bindusāra

Aśoka the Great

Bṛāhadratha the last Mauryan emperor, a weak ruler who could not stop Bactrian Greek incursions into the empire was assassinated in public at a review of the Imperial forces by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga, the commander-in-chief.

Śuṅga Empire

Puṣyamitra (187-149 BCE)	Used the title of Senānī (commander-in-chief) and not of emperor
Agnimitra (149-141 BCE)	Viceroy at Ujjayinī, later succeeded his father; hero of Kālidāsa's play
Vasumitra (133-128 BCE)	Defeated the Greeks
Devabhūti	The last Śuṅga emperor; assassinated in 72 BCE

Śātavāhana empire	Third century BCE to third century CE
Gautamīputra Śatakarṇī	70 BCE

Saka Rule, followed by Śaiva kings, Bhāra Śivas, Nāgas and Śātavāhana rulers in Malwa, 'Kalidasa country' succeeded by the Imperial Guptas (4th-6th centuries CE).

Imperial Guptas

Samudra Gupta	335-375 CE
Chandra Gupta II (Vikramāditya)	375-414 CE
Kumāra Gupta	415-455 CE

NOTES

1 Intro. to the *Vikramādityacarita*, Harward Oriental series

2 D.C. Sircar, *Ancient Malwa and the Vikramāditya Tradition*

3 Shembavanekar, Date of Kālidāsa, p. 2333, JUB, Part VI, May 1933

4 Kshetresachandra Chattopadhyaya, AUS, Vol. II, 1926

5 Sakas or Scythians

6 See intro. Section IV

7 *Harṣacarita*, p. 193, trans. Cowell and Thomas

8 Kramrisch, Stella, *The Art of India*, pl. 22,23

9 Known as *dohada* referred to in *Megh. 77*

10 Mario Bussagli and Calambus Sivaramamurthi, p. 74. pl. 74; 5,000 Years of the Art of India.

11 Kramrisch, Stella, op.cit. pl. 39

12 National Museum, New Delhi

13 Bussagli and Sivaramamurti, op.cit. , pl. 67, p. 64

14 Kramrisch, Stella, op.cit., pl. 21

MYTHS

1. *The Descent of the Holy River, Gaṅgā*

Gaṅgā is a river goddess, one of the few female divinities celebrated in the *Ṛgveda.* The celestial river, celebrated under the name of Svargaṅgā (*Megh.* 45) flowed originally in space (*ākāsa)* in the form of what we now see and know as The Milky Way in our galaxy. She was brought down to earth by the severe penances of Bhagiratha, great-grandson of the mythic monarch Sagara.

Sagara wishing to attain the title of universal monarch arranged to perform a Horse-Sacrifice. Consecrating the right horse he loosed it to wander free all over the earth, guarded by his sixty thousand sons. The roaming of a sacrificial horse for a year symbolized the sovereignty of a monarch over all the lands the horse roamed unchallenged. Indra, Lord of Heaven, jealous of the power and glory that Sagara would gain by the successful completion of the sacrifice and afraid that the king might seek dominion in heaven itself, carried the horse away and left it to graze in the underworld near the hermitage of Kapila, a mighty sage who having adopted a vow of complete silence was performing austerities.

Searching high and low on earth and not finding the horse, the sixty thousand princes went down into the underworld and seeing Kapila asked if he had seen their father's sacrificial horse. When annoyed by the sage's silence they insulted him Kapila opened his eyes in anger and burnt them all to ashes. After waiting for several years, the old king sent his eldest grandson Aṁśumat in search; Aṁśumat recovered the horse and brought back news that the ashes of his uncles were lying unconsecrated for want of the proper funeral rites and that only the holy waters of the heavenly river could purify them so that their souls would go to heaven. His son Bhagīratha undertook the task of bringing Gaṅgā to earth, performing hundreds of years of severe penance in the Himalaya mountains till the goddess, pleased, agreed to come down if someone could support her fall so that its force would not shatter the earth's surface and destroy all life. Nobody could be found fit to do this except Śiva, who as the Lord of Beings, possessed the power to support Gaṅgā's descent. Bhagīratha went back to the mountains

to perform more austerities, this time to please Śiva, who agreed to bear the river on his head and let her flow down gently on to the earth. But Gaṅgā exulting in her own power fell on Śiva's head with such force that the god, infuriated, bound her up in his matted locks (*Megh:* 52). Bhagīratha left his kingdom and once more began a series of penances to make Śiva relent, and succeeded. The great god unbound one of his locks to allow part of the river to flow down gently. Chastened, Gaṅgā followed Bhagīratha to where the unconsecrated ashes of his ancestors lay in the underworld in a pile. But that was not the end of Bhagīratha's trials and tribulations. On her way, the river inundated the sacrificial grounds of another irascible sage, Jaḥnu, who was performing sacrificial rites at that moment, and was swallowed up in one mouthful by him. It was yet another bout of hardship and penance for Bhagīratha. The sage, pleased with his dedication and loyalty to the family, relented and let the river out through one ear. Hence the river was reborn as it were, as the daughter of Jaḥnu (*Megh:* 52). Her waters inundated and purified the ashes of Sagara's sixty thousand sons, who were then able to reach heaven (*Megh:* 52). The huge concourse of waters formed the deep ocean and to honour Sagara, it was named, Sāgara, after him. And to honour that long-suffering and pious monarch, Bhagīratha, Gaṅgā was named, Bhāgīrathī. The name is still used for one of the three Himalayan rivers that join to form the great river Gaṅgā, before it comes bursting through the gorge near Haradvar (the gateway of Hara or Śiva). The other two rivers are known as Mandākinī and Alakanandā (*Megh.* 65). Gangā is described as triple-streamed (*Sak.* 7:6) because one stream still flows in heaven, one on earth and the third in the underworld. Mandākinī (softly-flowing) is sometimes the name given to the upper reaches of the river in the Garhwal Himalaya, and sometimes as the poet perhaps employs it in the long poem (*Kumārasambhavam*), for the Svargaṅgā (celestial Gangā) herself.

2. *Bali and Viṣṇu's Triple-Stride*

Aditi and Diti were sisters, daughters of Dakṣa, both married to Kaśyapa, the Primal Parent. Their sons were for ever fighting for supremacy over the universe. The sons of Aditi were the Devas, Immortals, with Indra as their overlord; the sons of Diti were Daityas or Titans. Bali was a famous Daitya king, who through devotion and penance had defeated Indra in battles, humbled the Devas and extended his dominion over the Triple-World. He was virtuous, a just ruler and magnanimous to a fault; no one who came to him asking for alms went away empty-handed. The Devas and Indra were disconsolate; Aditi, their mother wept in sorrow at their pitiable

state and prayed to Viṣṇu, who out of compassion for her promised to be born as her son, Vāmana (dwarf) to humble Bali and restore their pristine glory to her sons (*Sak.* 7.27).

Bali once performed a great sacrifice on the banks of the river Narmadā and gave away wealth in crores, lands and gifts to any one who came to him pleading need and distress. Vāmana arrived there and asked for some land just sufficient to cover three strides. Bali, though warned by his Preceptor, readily agreed. The dwarf put his foot out, grew in size and covered the whole earth in one stride. Growing enormously in size, he covered the whole of the heavens with a second stride, standing poised with uplifted foot to take the third and final stride. Bali, to keep his word meekly bent down and offered his head, saying 'This is all I have left, O All-Pervading Lord (Viṣṇu)'. Viṣṇu-Vāmana put his foot on Bali's bowed head and pushed him down to Pāṭāla. In later mythological accounts, Pātāla signifies the nether world and Bali, therefore, became king of the nether world. But, Pātāla was a big port in the estuary of the river Indus which together with Broach at the mouth of the Narmadā handled the extensive trade between India and the Mediterranean lands, Alexandria and Rome, and earlier Greece. A war of two peoples seems to underlie this mythological tale of two peoples or two great confederations of tribes who fought for the land between the Himalayas and the river Narmadā in the peninsula. A solar myth is also involved in this tale. Viṣṇu, literally, All-Pervader, was originally the sun (*Ṛgveda*). The triple-stride represents the path of the sun across the sky with three clearly marked stations: dawn, noon, sunset. Vāmana, the dwarf is the early morning sun that grows and waxes in power and pervades the whole universe, except the nether world (the antipodes), which then becomes Bali's realm of darkness. Obviously this myth belongs to the period in proto-history when the earth was conceived of as flat, prior to the round-earth theory (earth as a sphere) suggested in parts of the *Ṛgveda*.

3. *The Churning of the Ocean*

In the Beginning, Devas and Asuras (or Daityas), strove to obtain amṛta, the elixir of immortality (the sap of life). Viṣṇu advised them to throw in bits of all the great medicinal herbs into the Milky Ocean (Milky Way in the space-ocean) and churn it, using the cosmic mountain, Mandara as the stick, and Vāsuki, the serpent Time, as the rope. After great toil many wondrous things emerged out of the frothing ocean. First rose Surabhi, the cow of plenty, who granted all wishes to the good; then Vāruṇī, Wine; third, the Tree of Paradise emerged, bearing innumerable, unfading

flowers, whose fragrance perfumed the whole world; then rose the apsarās in all their beauty. The apsarās are twelve in number, but four of them, named Rambhā, Urvaśī, Menakā, Tilottamā were the main apsarās who figure in Sanskrit literature and constantly alluded to. Apsarā means literally 'Born of The Waters'.

The apsarās as soon as they rose from the waves were appropriated by Indra, Lord of The Immortals, the Devas, as his own and became the dancers in his opulent court. They were often employed by Indra to seduce just rulers on earth and sages who performed severe austerities as Menakā was. Kālidāsa alludes to this in *Śakuntalā* (1.25ff).

The apsarās were followed by the cool-rayed moon that Śiva claimed as his share and placed as a crest jewel on his topknot of matted hair.

Other fabulous objects then rose from the ocean's waves; the spotless white horse Ucchaiśravas and the spotless, white elephant, Airāvata, both of which Indra, as Lord of the Devas, took for himself.

The Ocean then spewed out deadly poison that Śiva immediately swallowed to preserve the universe, retaining it in his throat which turned blue- black.

Beauty (Śrī) herself, seated on a lotus then rose in glory and was followed by the archetypal physician Dhanvantari holding the bowl containing the Sap of Life (amṛta) in his hands.

The story continues with the fierce battle for the amṛta and the stratagem of Viṣṇu by which only the Devas got to taste the ambrosia and gain immortality, the daityas or asuras being defeated.

In this myth, a very central myth in Indian metaphysics and art, *The Waters* are the waters, not of any earthly ocean but of the cosmic ocean in space. The image of the ocean is a metaphor for the sea of seeds of creation that are contained in space which is viewed in ancient Indian cosmography as filled, pervaded, by an almost intangible substance named ākāsạ (ether), a sort of gaseous substance which provides the building blocks for the creation of the universe with its various and varied forms of being, both moving and unmoving, sentient and insentient. This sea or cosmic ocean contains all the potentialities for form and life in an undifferentiated condition.

The lotus referred to above, supporting Śrī (Form, Beauty, Plenitude) is the symbol of the blossoming world that rose out of the still waters of the space-ocean. There are contradictions and inconsistencies in the many versions of the basic myth of origins, because they are layered, with different strands coming out of several ethno-cultural sources that reflect the heterogeneity of the people and the cultures that made up India and her civilization in the past. They are all fitted together to form a rich mythological mosaic but the joints sometimes show.

4. *Daksa's Sacrifice*

As already noted, there are many versions of the central myths, of origins, and other perennial themes that have always exercised the human imagination. The myths, rising perhaps in different ethno-cultural contexts, crisscross in a bewildering web of interrelated stories, legends all woven round perennial themes, to form a fascinatingly rich fabric. All this material has been fitted over millennia into a pattern that reflects the true mosaic of India's many peoples with their diverse cults and cultures. India's civilization is a product of multiple streams of tradition, both the greater and the lesser traditions. And sometimes there appear some inconsistencies, even some contradictions.

Dakṣa is one of the central figures in mythology, being a primal creator, around whom several varying myths have gathered. I shall not rehearse all of them, but confine myself only to what is relevant in the context of the narrative structure of Kālidāsa's poems.

Dakṣa, ('dexterous') was born of Brahmā, the Primal Creator, from his thumb. He is one of the fourteen Prajāpatis, Patriarchs or Ancestors (Pitṛs) from whom all forms of creation, human and non-human came into existence. Each of the Prajāpatis presided over a Kalpa, an Age of the Cosmos extending over an immeasurably long period of millions of years; each initiated the process of creation at that point in time. At the end of a Kalpa, when Time itself came to an end, the Cosmos was totally destroyed by the Great Deluge, Pralaya and dissolved into the Primal Waters to emerge again as a fresh world with a new Prajāpati to start creation after a period of quiescence lasting millions of years. In Saiva mythology, the ashes of the destroyed cosmos remained, and out of these the new universe emerged. We are believed to be living in the fourteenth Kalpa, initiated millions upon millions of years ago by the Prajāpati, Vaivasvata Manu, son of the Sun.

Dakṣa had seven daughters, the youngest being Satī, given in marriage to Śiva. Once Dakṣa held a sacrifice, the Great Sacrifice, Mahāyajña, to which he invited all the divinities, to participate in the rite and receive their allotted share; all except one, Śiva, his own son-in-law.

Satī was all excited to attend the sacrifice though her father had not invited her. Though she was strongly dissuaded from attending the sacrifice by Śiva, she insisted on going to her parental home. Humiliated beyond measure because she was not welcomed and her husband, Śiva had been pointedly excluded, Śatī abandoned her life through Yoga-Samādhi. Siva's grief and wrath knew no bounds, so terrible was it that he destroyed Dakṣa's

sacrifice, and demons that he created out of his anger rampaged and killed and committed general mayhem in the sacrificial hall.

In one variant myth, Dakṣa is killed. In another he is restored to life but given a goat's head instead of his own that had been severed by Śiva's arrow. In a further variant myth, the Sacrifice itself, assumed the form of a deer and flew up in terror into the sky to escape Śiva's arrow. A reference to this arrow and the deer is contained in the poem *Kumārasambhavam* (7.51 and n. 16 explaining the reference). There is also a reference to this in *Śak.1.6*

Śiva wandered over the whole universe carrying Satī's corpse on his shoulders until Viṣṇu dismembered it with his discus.

5. *Tārakāsura, the Great Titan*

Tāraka was the son of the Dānava, Vajrānga (Adamantine-Limbs), one of the great Titans and son of Kaśyapa, the Patriarch and Primal Ancestor of all forms of being in creation and his wife Danu.

Vajrānga who was extremely pious and virtuous once decided to perform severe austerities to rid himself of all the dark passions, the asuric elements that exist as part of one's personality in all beings. When he returned home after a thousand years, he could not find his wife, the beautiful Varāṅgī. Searching everywhere, he finally found her under a tree, weeping bitterly. And she told her husband how she had been harassed all the time, the thousand years that Vajrāṅga had been away performing penance, by the Devas (the Immortals or Luminous Ones; gods as they are sometimes referred to) chiefly by the Lord of the Immortals, Indra himself, who had taken terrifying shapes to terrorize, assault and violate her. Cut to the heart, the grieving Vajrāṅga performed harsh penance once again to Brahmā, the Creator, the Grandfather. Brahmā, pleased with Vajrāṅga, appeared before him and offered him a boon. Vajrāṅga asked that a son be born to him who would surpass Indra and all the Devas. After twelve months Tāraka was born to Vajrāṅga and his wife.

When he was very young, the brilliant Tāraka decided to perform severe penance to Brahmā. He was granted a boon by the Grandfather that he would meet his death at the hands of none but a child seven days old. In a variant, Tāraka performed penance to propitiate Śiva who granted him the boon that none but a son of his own (Śiva's) would kill him.

Armed with the boons, Tāraka grew arrogant. He conquered the Triple-World and became master of the universe. Canto 2 of *Kumārasambhavam* contains these details.

The emanation of Śiva became manifest as Kumāra who waxed enormously from the moment of his birth in the clump of reeds by the banks of the river Gaṅgā to become a full-grown warrior on the seventh day after his birth; and he fought Tāraka and killed him.

At this point, a brief note is needed to explain the term Asura. In the *Ṛgveda,* the term Asura is employed to designate the Supreme godhead Varuṇa; it is also used for Indra, Agni and others as well. Asu + ra, splitting the word to make the meaning clear – *asu* meaning breath, life, existence, the spirit, and *ra* being the possessive termination, the word denotes the 'divine', 'spiritual', 'incorporeal', basically the *living,* implying an entity that has power, life and goodness; a meaning it retains in the old Iranian religion and its sacred texts as in Ahura. (Ahura Mazda is the mighty divinity). Later its meaning was changed to its opposite and signified an evil spirit. Asuras then were ranged against the Devas to become demonized. The Deva-Asura battle was drawn as the war of the forces of light and darkness. This might have some historical basis in a war of opposing tribes or peoples. In war and other confrontational situations, the enemy's gods are always demonized and his culture denigrated.

Keeping this history of the word in mind, we might explain asuric[a] as demonic. The word demon itself has changed its meaning in English, from the Greek-derived *daemon (daimon)* meaning an attendant spirit or guardian spirit to the current pejorative sense of the words, demon, demonic.

a. The Sanskrit terms Asura, Daitya, Dānava are often used loosely and interchangeably as the opposites of Deva. The term Asura has already been explained. Diti, the mother of Daityas and Danu, the mother of the Dānavas may not have been sisters; but they seem to have been counted as the wives of the Primal Ancestor, Kaśyapa.

APPENDIX III

SOURCES FOR ABHIJÑĀNAŚĀKUNTALAM

Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta : Mahābhārata ; Book 1 : chs 62-69

The bard Vaiśampāyana tells this story to the monarch Janamejaya, descendant of Bharata, at the Great Sacrifice that the monarch was performing.

Duṣyanta[a], out on a great hunt, arrived at Kaṇva's Hermitage, deep in the forests by the river Mālinī, to pay his respects to the revered sage. There he met Śakuntalā who was alone, her father having gone out of the hermitage to gather fruit. She offered the king due hospitality and in response to his questions about herself, told him the story of her birth as she had heard it from her 'father's own lips'. The Apsarā Menakā, had abandoned her as soon as she was born and some birds (*Śakunta*) taking pity on the new-born babe had protected and fed it until Kaṇva found the child and brought it up as his own daughter.

The king enamoured of Śakuntalā's uncommon beauty and grace wanted to marry her according to the Gandharva mode of marriage, a recognized form of marriage based on love and mutual agreement. Śakuntalā demurred, asking him to wait for her father's return, 'When my father returns, 0 King, he will himself give me to you.' But the infatuated Duṣyanta wanted to marry her instantly and began persuading her that according to the Law, she had complete right over herself and did not need parental permission to dispose of herself. Śakuntalā replied that if it was not against the Law, she would become his wife on one condition, that the son born to her would be the heir apparent and succeed him as king. The king agreed and took her as his wife, and then left for his capital promising to send for her with the proper retinue accompanied by a detachment of his army. Kaṇva on his return to the Hermitage soon after was pleased and felicitated Śakuntalā on her excellent choice of a husband. But Duṣyanta, apprehensive about how the sage Kaṇva would react to this union contracted during his brief absence from the Hermitage did not send for her.

a. Duṣyanta, the name used in the Mahabharata and Duḥṣanta, used in the recension of *Śankuntalā* that I have based my translation on are variants of the same name.

A son was born, blazing like fire; years went by until Kaṇva noticing the extraordinary strength and energy that the boy displayed, advised Śakuntalā that it was time to take him to his father and get him consecrated as the heir apparent, and sent her with her son in the company of some hermits to the capital. Śakuntalā arriving at Duṣyanta's palace, had herself announced, and having duly honoured him, presented her son to him. 'Here, 0 King, is the son, resembling a god, born of your strength; now accept him and carry out the promise you made.'

Duṣyanta, although he remembered his promise and every detail of their meeting and marriage, pretended to remember nothing and in the cruellest and most insulting words asked her to take her boy and get out.

Śakuntalā, shattered by Duṣyanta's treatment of her, stood dumbfounded, but being a girl of great spirit and courage decided to fight for her son's rights. Even though she could have destroyed him by the power of her penance, she remained calm and explained the Law to him and laid out what his duties and obligations were under the Law to her and his son. Seeing that all her arguments were of no avail, she flung these last words at him, that she would not have anything to do with a man like him, but that in the end her son would be sovereign; and prepared to leave. At that point, an aerial voice spoke testifying to the truth of Śakuntalā's words and demanded that the king keep his promise to her. The nobles, ministers and priests at the Court heard the aerial voice and accepted its testimony. Relieved, Duṣyanta welcomed her with costly gifts and received her and his son with honour, making Śakuntalā Queen and consecrating the boy as heir apparent.

The story ends with Duṣyanta explaining to Śakuntalā as to why he had acted as he did. The marriage having been a secret one, unwitnessed, his ministers and people would have doubted the legality of the marriage and the legitimacy of the prince. 'I forgive you all the unpleasant words you spoke to me, my beloved, because I love you,' he says welcoming her and accepting his son as the heir.

Glossary

Aditi	'Boundless', the infinitude of space. In myth Aditi is called the 'mother of the gods'; she is the daughter of the Primal Ancestor, Dakṣa.
Airāvata	The celestial elephant who rose from the ocean when it was churned for Amṛta (ambrosia) at the Beginning; the mount of Indra.
Alakā	Kubera's capital on Mt. Kailāsa.
Apsarā	'Born of the waters'; celestial dancers; guardians of pools.
Aruṇa	The very first light of dawn; the word signifies a coppery-red; Aruṇa is the charioteer of the sun.
Ash/Ashes	The residue of the universe when it is burnt and destroyed at the end of a great epoch (mahā-kalpa) by fire, wind and water. A new universe is created out of the ashes after a long period of rest. Ash is therefore a symbol of dissolution and re-creation. Sacred ash is given to devotees as symbolic of this cosmic process.
Asoka	An evergreen blooming in Spring; the compact clusters of blossoms varying in colour from pale orange to scarlet, depending on their age, cover the tree completely; the flowers have a delicate fragrance. The Aśoka (a-śoka) meaning 'sorrow-less' is a tree celebrated in myth and legend. The flower is one of the five flower-arrows of Kāma, god of love; Sita, the heroine of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* who was abducted by Rāvaṇa, the demon-king of Lankā, spent a year in his Aśoka-grove, waiting in sorrow for Rama to come and rescue her. The tree was believed to bloom at the touch of the richly-jewelled left foot of a lovely young woman.
Atimukta	A variety of fragrant jasmine; the petals are sparkling white; the tubes and underside of two of the petals are a pale purple, clearly noticeable in the buds; probably what is commonly known as chameli.

Avanti	The ancient name for Malwa, now the western part of the state of Madhya Pradesh. Avanti is a very ancient kingdom, mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* as one of the 16 great kingdoms – mahā-janapada. In the time of Gautama Buddha (sixth century BCE), it was very powerful under its ruler Pradyota; Ujjayinī was its capital. Avanti was a rich kingdom because of its overseas trade which passed through Ujjayinī.
Bakula or Kesara	A beautiful timber tree bearing clusters of small, pale-cream flowers that retain their fragrance when dry. *Mimusops Elengi* is the botanical name of this tree.
Bali	Literally 'offering'; the name of an ancient king famed for his magnanimity; see under 'Bali and Visnu's Three Strides' in Appendix II : Myths.
Bandhūka	Jungle geranium; *Ixora Coccinea.* A small shrub that blooms all the year round but specially luxuriant during the rains; the tubular flowers form thick heads, a brilliant orange in colour.
Betel	A vine whose leaves are chewed after meals; the juice is a digestive. The common Indian name is paan.
Bhavānī	'Becoming' as opposed to 'being'; the feminine formed from 'Bhava' one of Śiva's epithets. It is one of the many names for Śakti, Śiva's inherent power, that brings the world into existence.
Blossoming time	Certain trees were believed to bloom from contact with a lovely young woman; either from the touch of her hands or her jewelled foot, or by being sprinkled with wine from her mouth. This is a poetic convention known as '*dohada*'—the longings of a pregnant woman.
Blue of his throat	Śiva swallowed the deadly poison spewed out by the Ocean when it was churned at the Beginning (according to a myth of Origins) and retained it in his throat to save the newly-created universe from destruction by being burnt by the poison; an ambivalent myth, because the churning produces treasures as well as poison. In this context, it underlines the highest service that can be done, to serve the good of others at great cost to one's own wellbeing.

Blue-throated	Peacock.
Bodiless One	Kāma, the god of Love; puffed up with pride, Kāma had the temerity to assail the Great Yogi, Śiva, seated on Mt. Kailāsa in meditation, to break the Lord's single-minded contemplation. A spark from Śiva's third eye – the inner eye of wisdom – burnt Kāma to ashes. This myth is beautifully developed in the third canto of *Kumārasambhavam* by Kālidāsa.
Brahmā	'One with Brahma or holy creative power'; the Creator.
Cakravāka(m) Cakravākī(f)	The sheldrake or ruddy goose; also known as Brahminy Duck; these birds formed loving pairs and became a symbol in literature for connubial love and constancy; they were believed to have been cursed by a sage or by Rama, to spend nights apart; in fact they forage at opposite sides of a stream or pool and call constantly to each other.
Cātaka	The crested cuckoo, sometimes identified as the hawk-cuckoo. Because of its persistent and peculiar call, it is also known as the brain-fever bird. The cātaka is believed to subsist only on rain drops; as it disdains to drink any other water, it has become a symbol in literature of pride and self-respect; it is associated with clouds and rain. To see a cātaka on the left is a good omen; (*Megh. 9*).
Chowries	Fly-whisks and fans made of the soft hair of yaks' tails and bound and set in ornamental handles were used ceremonially to fan deity and royalty.
Crest-jewel.	The moon is depicted in iconography as Śiva's crest jewel; it might symbolize the life-sap contained in the bowl of the moon (see under Tree of paradise) or be a residual feature derived from the iconographical representation of an ancient horned god depicted on Indus seals (second and third millennium BCE) and identified with an early form of Śiva; the bull as Śiva's mount might also be linked to this old conception and representation of deity. The moon is represented as a crescent on Śiva's topknot in iconography.
Cosmic dance	The dance of creation and destruction; the two acts are inseparable; nothing can be formed without something

else being destroyed; all creative acts are acts of *transforming*. Everything is born and destroyed in and by Time (*Mahākāla*). The metaphor of the dance is used in Saiva myth and metaphysics to figure the process of creation; dance is movement, 'a becoming' in space and time.

Dance Drama — Same as the cosmic dance. *The Burning of the Triple-City* was the first drama said to have been composed by Brahmā, the Creator, and performed on Kailāsa before Śiva and Śakti by Bharata and his troupe; see Intro. p. 12.

Dakṣa — 'Skill, dexterity'; the power to *fashion*; Aditi, from whom the Devas were born and Diti from whom the Daityas were born were his daughters; he had many other daughters – 50, 27 are the figures mentioned – from whom sprang all the animals and birds. Daksa is therefore the Primal Parent.

Darbha — Sacred grass used in Vedic rituals (still in use in rites and ceremonies).

Deva/Devī[a] — The bright or shining ones; gods and goddesses of Light.

Devī[b] — The crowned queen of a monarch.

Divine Fire — Agni, the Creative Energy; The terms Sacred Fire and Mystic Fire found in the play also refer to Agni.

Durvā — Sacred grass, sleek and dark-green; according to Sir William Jones, its tiny flowers 'look like rubies and emeralds'.

Elephant-hide — When illusion in the form of a fierce, demonic tusker (gaja-asura) attacked Śiva's devotees (and in one variant Śiva himself), Śiva ripped the demon's hide in one clean sweep from trunk to tail and flinging the blood-moist hide over his shoulders, danced in ecstasy. The Śiva concept of godhead is a composite one and complex. One of its constituting elements is of an ancient war-god. In myth, asuras or demons, represent brute power, energy running rampant, unguided and uncontrolled by any higher principle, which makes it evil and destructive.

Eyebrow play — The language of coquetry.

Gandharva rite — Marriage by rites of mutual love; no ceremony or consent

	of the family was required; it was more or less a form of marriage reserved for warriors (Kṣatriyas), but it had to be undertaken with a full sense of the responsibilities involved. It is recognized in Manusmṛti as a legal marriage.
Gaṅgā	The Ganges is the holiest of India's great rivers and the life-giving river of the northern plains; rises in the Garhwal Himalayas and flows east into the Bay of Bengal. The river has may names; see Appendix II: Myths, for the myth of its descent from heaven.
Gaurī	'The bright goddess' – one of the names of the mother-goddess, born of the snows of the Himalayas and hence 'Gauri', white, brilliant; Parvati is another name meaning 'mountain-born'.
Glory	Is described as spotlessly white in Sanskrit literature; perhaps, because royal glory is symbolized by the white chowries and umbrella.
Hara	'Remover' of illusion and ignorance; one of Śiva's epithets.
Hema-Kūta	'Golden Peak'—a name for Mt. Kailāsa.
Indra	Lord of Heaven; Chief of the Immortals; god of thunder and rain, sustainer of the universe; Indra is with Agni (Fire) the most-invoked deity in the Ṛgveda. He is the bountiful giver of riches, 'maghona'. He is referred to by many names in the play Śakuntalā, all of which I have translated.
Indra's bow	The rainbow.
Iṅgudi	Hermit-tree; its nuts provided ascetics with oil for their lamps and a medicinal salve for wounds.
Jahṇu's daughter	The river Gaṅgā; Jahṇu was an angry old sage who drank up the waters of the river Gaṅgā brought down from heaven because the river's flow inundated his sacrificial grounds. Relenting, he released the river through his ear; the river is therefore considered as his offspring or daughter, born of his body.
Jewelled Belts	An important part of the ancient Indian woman's dress: it kept the lower garment in place like a belt but it was also ornamental. Girdles were made of gold or silver,

	of elaborate filigree-work or were gem-studded and had loops of little bells at the lower edge to make a sweet, tinkling sound as the woman moved around.
Kailāsa	Holiest of Himalayan peaks; considered the temporal abode of Śiva and Śakti. Nearby is the sacred lake of Mānasa or Mānasarovar. Kailāsa is described in the Purāṇas as the fabled mountain of priceless gems and sparkling crystal created as the playground of the divine.
Kāla-nemi	A myriad-headed demon.
Kandalī	A small plant springing up with the first heavy rains, bearing tiny purple flowers.
Karṇikāra	The golden champa; has large, showy, flowers with slender petals that twist and curve back.
Ketaka, also Ketakī	Screw-pine (Pandanus); the outer leaves are a dark-green, long and tough with serrated edges, sharp as needle-points. The inner leaves are a pale gold, and sheath the creamy efflorescence, both carrying a heavy perfume. Women wear the fragrant leaves stuck in hair knots or plait them into wreaths for their chignon. An essence is made out of the young leaves and efflorescence to be used in perfumes; the essence is also used to scent drinking water, sweets and desserts.
Kiṁśuka	The Flame-of-the-Forest; a magnificent flowering tree; the scarlet blossoms form spikes; each flower has a curved petal forming a keel which makes it look like a parrot's beak. The word kim-śuka, means 'what-a-parrot' or 'what? A parrot?'; Kim – what? And śuka – parrot.
Kimpuruṣa	A class of divine beings like yakṣas and kinnaras.
Kinnara (m) Kinnarī (f)	A class of divine beings like the yakṣas; they are the celestial singers. Kinnarī – woodland nymph.
Kubera	God of Wealth and Lord of the earth's treasures; called the 'King of Kings' because he is the yakṣa overlord. See note on yakṣas.
Kurabaka	Philippine violet? or amaranth grown as ornamental hedge.
Kuśa	Sacred grass, strewn on Vedic altars; a relic of ancient

Indo-Iranian sacrificial ritual.

Lākṣā Lac-juice, used to tint the palms and soles of the feet; the juice is a deep rose-red.

Lord of Mountains The Himalayas, also called 'Mountain of Snows'.

Lotus There are several varieties; those that bloom during the day touched by the sun's rays, and the night-blooming lotuses; they come in many colours: white, pink, deep rose or red, and deep blue; the last is really a deep purple shade.

Mādhavī The spring-creeper, bears white flowers, like the jasmine.

Mahākāla The name of Śiva in the shrine at Ujjain. Kāla is time; Mahākāla is time projected on the cosmic plane. It is one of the many epithets of Śiva. The shrine of Māhakāla at Ujjain is of great antiquity; it may have originally been a cave-shrine because at present steps lead down to it. A silver serpent, symbol of Time, circles the liṅga.

Mālatī A variety of jasmine – most varieties of jasmine bloom at night and fill the night air with their fragrance.

Mānasa 'Mind-born'; the sacred lake in the Kailāsa range; haunt of wild geese, swans and flamingos that have their breeding grounds in that region. Both Kailāsa and Mānasa being in Tibet are now in Chinese territory.

Mandāra One of the five trees of paradise; it has been identified with the rhododendron, native to the Himalayan valleys. In myth Mandāra flowers are unfading.

Mārīca Also known as Kaśyapa; a primal parent (prajāpati); son of Marīcī. The name Marīcī is associated with light, luminosity; marīcī signifies a 'ray of light'.

Mārịṣa Assistant to the manager, perhaps a stage manager. Also one the actors.

Nicula It may be a species of palm with succulent stems. Pātalī

Pātala and Pātalī Identified as the trumpet-tree; the pale, pink blossoms are trumpet-shaped and have a delicate fragrance; a species of Bignonia.

Pinākī Lord Śiva; the *pināka* is the bow that destroys evil and ignorance; the bow is also considered as Time.

Pravaha Seven winds or air currents are mentioned in ancient cosmographic accounts as circling in space; Pravaha is the current just above the level of clouds.

Priyaṅgu A vine with slender, dark-bluish stems; it grows into a thicket; the flowers are yellow and fragrant.

Puru The youngest son of Yayāti of the lunar dynasty, is celebrated for the filial affection and obedience he displayed in exchanging his own youth, beauty and strength for his father's bodily decrepitude brought on by a curse. The Kings of the Paurava (Puru's) dynasty who succeeded him were expected to follow the noble ideal set up by him of putting service for others above their own interests. Puru was rewarded by ultimately succeeding his father as the 'universal monarch' (cakravarti) even though he was the youngest son. King lists are provided in the *Mahabharata* and in the Puranas of the two celebrated dynasties of India in ancient times: the Solar and the Lunar, descended from the Sun and the Moon. Rama, hero of the epic *Rāmāyana* belonged to the former and the heroes of Kālidāsa's two plays based on myth, Purūrava and Duhṣanta, to the latter. The poet's epic *Raghuvaṁśam* has the solar dynasty for its theme.

Rājahamsa Regal Swans; literally King of Swans; it is variously identified as the flamingo, the bar-head goose and the Chinese swan; the last is the most beautiful species of swans, a pure white, with vermilion beak, orange legs and black claws; a splendid looking bird, in short, deserving the title of King of Swans. It is a rare species.

Rati The goddess-consort of Kāma (Eros).

Ritual baths Certain ceremonies requires frequent purifying baths during their performance. The hair was washed and knotted, but not dressed.

Revā River Narmadā, rises in the eastern Vindhya ranges and flows right across the peninsula to fall into the Arabian Sea. The ancient port of Bhṛgu-kaccha (Broach) through which most of the extensive trade between India and Rome via Alexandria passed, was situated near the river's mouth.

Rohiṇī	The bright star Aldebaran in Taurus.
Rukmiṇī	Princess of Vidarbha; she was betrothed to Śisupāla of Cedi, but being deeply in love with Kṛṣṇa, sent a secret message to him to come to her wedding and carry her away by force.
Sagara	An ancient mythical king; see Appendix II : Myths, The Descent of the Gangā.
Sāras crane	It stands five feet tall with bluish-grey plumage; head and underfeathers are a shining red; they inhabit mostly pools and marshy places and frequent rice-fields and have a trumpet-like call.
Sarasvatī	'Flowing waters'. The river celebrated as most sacred in the Vedas. The Vedic tribes performed their great sacrifices on its banks. The river loses itself in the sands of the Rajastan desert at some point in time. Later the word signifies the Śakti or power of Brahmā, the Creator; the name also symbolizes learning, eloquence, wisdom. Later, Sarasvatī becomes the muse of poetry and the patron-deity of the arts. An ancient civilization, the Sārasvata, is believed to have flourished in the Sarasvatī Valley. Excavations are in progress.
Siddha/s	'The perfected ones'. Humans who through merit and yogic practices become semi-divine, gaining psychic and super human powers known as Siddhis.
Siddhis	There are eight superhuman powers: to become minute; airy and light; enormous; powerful; attain all wishes; possess selfcontrol; lordship and the ability to move freely at will.
Single braid	The hair simply twisted or plaited in one braid; the sign of a woman grieving separated from her husband.
Śirīṣa	One of the loveliest of Indian flowering trees; the composite flowers are made up of tiny tubular florets, pale cream or deep rose in colour and crested with fine, long, silky filaments, the effect of which is to make the delicate flowers look like miniature powder puffs.
Śiva	Literally Good, Beneficent, Auspicious. In Puranic mythology, Śiva is defined as one of the Trinity, its destructive apect; but in Saivism or Siva-ism which in its

earlest form is perhaps the earliest of the religions in the country, Śiva is the Supreme Being, the Absolute One and Śakti, its inherent power. It should be remembered that the many names given to the divine are attributes of the unitive godhead or descriptive of its myriad functions; they are not separate gods.

Soma-tīrtha 'The ford of the moon'—Soma, the moon was said to have been cured of the 'wasting disease' (consumption) which afflicted him when his father-in-law Dakṣa cursed him for showing a preference for one of his twenty-seven wives (the constellations), Rohiṇī (Aldebaran) over the others. This is a myth to explain the waxing and waning of the moon. Soma-tīrtha was a famous place of pilgrimage known as Prabhāsa, in Kathiawad, near the celebrated temple of Somnath. It was believed to be the abode of 'the wind-driven fire' and therefore called the 'mouth of the gods', because all oblations to gods are offered into the Sacrificial Fire; this is implied in Priyamvadā's words to Anasūyā describing Kaṇva's felicitation of Śakuntalā (Act 4). It was probably a place where subterranean gases or vapours emerged out of the rock or a fissure near some natural gas deposit.

Syāmā The word has three meanings: (i) a slender vine also known as Priyaṅgu, (ii) a young woman who has borne no children, (iii) a young woman with a glowing, pale gold complexion.

Tree of Paradise (Kalpavṛkṣa) The wish-granting tree. In later myth five trees are described as growing in Nandana, Indra's special grove in Paradise; the bowl containing ambrosia (Amṛta), the drink of Immortality, was set at the base of the Tree of Paradise, on its roots; the Kalpavṛkṣa is the original Tree of Life; the bowl of Amrta was guarded by a serpent, while an archer sat hidden in the branches of the tree with his arrow fixed to shoot at anyone trying to steal it. The sun in the form of a golden falcon, stole the bowl, brought it down to earth in a golden boat and placed it on Mūjavat, the twin peak of Kailāsa. Through a mythic labyrinth to which I have as yet not found the clue, the

bowl in later literature becomes the moon which is also known as Soma; the ancients believed that the life-sap (Soma) dripped from the moon on plants at night and from there entered animals and human beings. But whereas in Paradise the gods who drank from this ever-replenished bowl were ever-young and immortal, once the ambrosia *fell*, that is descended, into the world, this was not so. The trees in Paradise had jewelled leaves, fruits and flowers.

Triple-city The three cities of gold, silver and iron built for the Titans (Dānavas) in the sky, in the air and on earth; a spark from Śiva's third eye burnt all three to ashes. At a metaphysical level the Triple-city represents the three-fold darkness of human consciousness.

Triple-world (i) Heaven, the realm of light, (ii) Earth, (iii) the Underworld.

Udayana The Vatsa monarch; a famous king of the sixth century BCE, contemporary of the Buddha. He ruled over the Vatsa kingdom, one of the three powerful kingdoms (with Avanti and Magadha); Kosāmbi (Kosam, near Allahabad) was his capital. A cycle of stories gathered round his fame as a hero, celebrating his exploits in love and war. He was also an accomplished musician and his lute was equally famous.

Ujjayinī Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh; one of the greatest cities in ancient India; see Intro., p. 6. It is also one of the earliest human settlements in the country.

Vetravatī 'River with reeds'; River Betwa near the modern town of Bhilsa not far from Bhopal.

Vidiśā Like Ujjayinī, a great and wealthy city, capital of powerful kingdoms in ancient India; on the trade route from the Imperial capital of Pātalīputra to the Arabian Sea ports. The Emperor Aśoka's chief queen was the beautiful daughter of a banker of Vidiśā.

Village-shrines Caityas, simple shrines, sometimes with a small image within and a flag on its roof were built at the base of ancient trees, especially the sacred fig tree, on a raised platform round the base of the tree trunk. A few flowers,

fruit were placed there as an offering to honour the tree-spirit. Passers-by stopped to offer flowers, fruit or a few incense sticks. It is part of the yakṣa-yakṣi cults of ancient India. Such shrines can still be seen in central and southern India.

Visākhā Bright twin stars in Libra; alpha and beta Libra.

Viṣṇu 'All-Pervader'; originally a sky god; therefore depicted as blue in colur. Viṣṇu, in the earliest conception is a solar deity, the sun that pervades the universe with light and heat and strides across the sky, 'the wide-stepping second stride'. Viṣṇu is believed to be immersed for four months (mid-August to mid-November) in yoga-nidrā, the sleep of contemplation.

Wheel The water-wheel or Persian wheel; a number of buckets or metal containers were attached to its rim to draw water out of pools and streams.

Yakṣa Pre-Brahmanic divinities of the ancient people of the country, replaced by Vedic and Puranic gods and fitted into the pantheon in subordinate positions; originally forces of nature and indwelling spirits of trees and pools, they were associated with fertility and plenitude. They were worshipped as givers of life and riches. Kubera was their overlord, lord of all the earth's treasures; later assigned the position of regent of the north. Śiva himself probably a pre-Vedic deity is invoked as 'the lord in a yakṣa-form'. The Purāṇas place Kubera's kingdom in the trans-Himalayan region; he is sovereign over many yakṣa-rulers whose cities were wealthy, possessing splendid mansions and beautiful gardens—a kind of Earthly Paradise.

Yamunā River Jumna; one of the three great rivers of the northern Indian plains; it joins the Gangā at Allahabad; the confluence is a very sacred spot. Delhi is situated on the banks of the Yamunā.

Yayāti Father of Puru and possibly the first 'universal monarch' (samrāt); a good and just ruler, and one of the most celebrated monarchs in the lunar line of kings (see appendix for the genealogical tables). He was the son of Āyus and grandson of Purūrava, the protagonist in

Kālidāsa's play *Vikramorvaśīyam.* One day, while out hunting, pressed by intense thirst, he was wandering looking for water and reached a well. But the well was empty. And to his astonishment there was a beautiful girl lying in it catching hold of the grass growing on the side of the well and crying out for help. It was Devayānī, daughter of Sukrācārya (also known as Kāvya, son of the sage, Kavi; and also as Uśana which was his real name, Kāvya being a patronymic). Kāvya Uśana was the high priest and spiritual preceptor of Vṛsaparva, King of the Dānavas. He was also the royal physician, possessing the secret of the sanjīvanī, the herb and mantra that revive the dead; and as well a master strategist in battle. Thus he was indispensable to Vṛsparva, the Dānavas and their cause bringing them victory in their bitter battles against their cousins and enemies, the Devas. Devayāni, who clearly understood that the prince who was looking at her in the well was Yayāti cried out piteously to him to help her out of the well and save her life. 'Grasp my right hand and take me out' she said to the prince. Taking an unmarried girl by the right hand signified marriage (pāṇigrahanam) Yayāti took her by the right hand and helped her out from the well; and then she told him how it had all happened A trivial quarrel between her and Śarmiṣṭha, daughter of the king, Vṛṣaparva had made the princess push her, Devayāṇī, into the well. And thinking that her friend Devayānī had perished inside the well, Śarmiṣṭhā had returned to the palace. Rescued by King Yayāti Devayānī went home and manipulated her father into threatening to abandon Vṛṣaparva and the Dānavas and their cause. She der anded that the price of her father continuing to help the Dānavas was the degradation of her erstwhile friend, the princess Śarmiṣṭha. Śarmiṣṭha was to become her attendant together with a thousand highborn Dānava maidens, and go with her to her husband's home when she got married. Yayāti was more or less tricked into marrying Devayānī. Sarmiṣṭha and her thousand companions had to go as Devayāni's attendants to Yayāti's palace, where Sarmiṣṭha fell deeply in love with the king and he seeing her

incomparable beauty and many virtues returned her love. Meeting in secret, because of Yayāti's promise to Devayānī and her father that he would never take Sarmiṣṭha to his royal bed Sarmiṣṭha bore the king three sons, the youngest of whom was Puru. When Devayānī discovered that Śarmiṣṭha had borne her husband, King Yayāti three handsome sons, she again demanded of her father that he punish Yayāti. Uśana did so, cursing Yayāti to become old, decrepit and lose his strength and virility. The curse would be remitted only if Yayāti could get someone else to exchange his decrepitude for that person's youth and strength; and for a thousand years, he, Yayāti could enjoy all the pleasures he had been deprived of when he was still young. Yayāti asked each of his five sons, two of Devayānī's and three of Śarmiṣṭhā's to exchange their youth for his old age. Only Puru, the youngest and third son of Śarmiṣṭhā agreed and willingly exchanged his own youth and vigour for his father's decrepitude. After a thousand years, Yayāti gave Puru back his youth and vigour, took on his own age and decrepitude, blessed Puru and gave him his whole empire, having disinherited all the four sons who had refused to help him in his hour of need. Yayāti then left for the forests and after a period of vānaprastha left for the other world. Puru became celebrated as the shining example of filial affection and obedience.

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Cover: Biplab Kundu

ISBN 81-260-1484-9

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